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Lilith

the independent Jewish women's magazine

sex and shame in a different era

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Lilith

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Cover: "Mexican Doll," by Joyce Stolaroff. Oil on board. The artist specializes in portraits of women. Contact: jstolaroff@usa.net; the Forrest Scott Gallery, New Jersey; or LewAllen Contemporary Gallery, New Mexico.

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from the editor

About Grief, and Clothing

What was she *really* like? It's a paradox for me. She read Anais Nin, but believed that not wearing lipstick was a crime against nature. My mother was a Canadian-born woman of immensely sophisticated tastes in music and theater, literature and painting, ideas and dress. Despite all this, upon hearing of any potential disaster, she would plead under her breath in Yiddish, "*Zol Der Ebershter oys-heetn*," "May the One Above guard against this." When comparing a living person she loved (me, for instance) to someone dead, she unfailingly added, "*Deehr tzu langeh yoor*," "May you have long life." Similarly with discussing illness; in any narrative about a sick friend she always inserted, "*Nisht fahr deehr gedakht*," "May such a thing not be intended for you."

But how did these phrases come to turn up in *my* speech? I hear her voice in me more times than I ever could have predicted. Hardly a pair of days goes by that I don't find myself quoting my mother, if not with a Yiddish line then with a funny, self-disparaging anecdote or a little rule-to-live-by; for example, that you have to be attentive to achieve good results: "You can *not* cook soup by proxy, dear." She meant it literally. Or that unless you feel a little nervous ("tight as a drum") before a speech or a performance you will not do your best. It wasn't until I lost her bit by bit over the years that I came to recognize how much of this advice was actually valuable, and how much of her, thank heavens, I had incorporated in memory over the years even as I struggled to be "myself."

> The paradoxes of a woman whose life spanned the century.

My mother, Zora Zagrabelna Weidman, died in November at age 92. Until Alzheimer's Disease confiscated first her memory and then her words, she was (at least to her family and community) extraordinary. She was physically strong, prodigiously energetic, smart and fun and great to look at. She loved language, and was an easy, entertaining raconteur, a talented writer and translator, avid Scrabble player and enthusiastic talker. She loved languages (English, Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian), ran (never strolled) to a dictionary to check a definition or to a book of poetry to get a line just right. She acted, sang cabaret, directed and produced plays in her native Winnipeg, and always believed that it was possible to enjoy at least five plays on any three-day visit to New York. Needless to say, she also drove me crazy, visiting me and uttering lines like, "Dear, if you only took *one hour* each morning to straighten up. . ."

My mother, lover of words, born Sarah, decided to become Zora at the age of 13. Unlike girls who were forced by teachers to Anglicize themselves, my mother's name change was self-induced by a desire to become more exotic, and it says something about how free my mother felt to create her own persona, even before she hit high school. Later, she drank rye whiskey, appreciated atonal music, knew the words and tunes to a zillion popular songs in many languages, had those spectacularly wonderful clothes and her own weekly radio program of Yiddish music. And also: cooked dinner every single night, served it on a starched and ironed tablecloth (even when we ate in the kitchen), ran a very orderly household, and shocked me, when I was 15, by going into rehearsal for a play she was directing and leaving my Dad and me to fend for ourselves for three whole evenings.

My mother's pals formed the "Vible Bible" Society (translation: "Women's Bible Society"), which met every Monday afternoon for about 40 years as a serious study group. These lifelong buddies (several were my mother's unknowing companions in the nursing home) read all through the Bible, then all of Shakespeare, then Joyce, then Anais Nin, then whatever else struck their fancy, correcting each other every step of the way. Last week we got a note from the daughter of one of these women: "The group still meets on Monday afternoons. Just not on this earth."

So what about the clothes? My mother loved all things aesthetic, but especially color and form. She was a passable painter, had a terrific eye for a "vista" (which made automobile travel with her when I was a teenager an especially trying experience). She was, however, indisputably masterful in sartorial matters.

Her tidy and thrilling closets and drawers were a recurrent source of pleasure to me, both as a child and as a grown woman. Paying a *shiva* call, my childhood friend asked me, "Where are her gold kid t-strap pumps?" She'd remembered from 1953, and I had too, of course. If I try, I can probably retrieve from active memory at least 30 of her outfits. Here's what I unpack when I think of her clothes: the emerald green angora dress with batwing sleeves and 4-inch wide purple suede belt (I think she considered this one an identity error, though I sure loved it, and loved seeing her in it), the elegant taupe suit with mink collar (worn with a mannish hat which embarrassed me), the starched and ironed housedresses and white nurses' shoes she donned every morning to do housework, before transforming herself at noon into a woman-about-town. The paradoxes continue—English literature and Yiddish superstitions, housedresses and the taupe suit. There was also the black moire silk long-sleeved dress (mink cuffs added later) for funerals, black slinky cocktail dress with rhinestone trim and laced-up-the-front plunging neckline, still remembered by the guys who saw it (and her) in my teen years.

I think I am so obsessed with recalling all the details of my mother's exquisite but in no way extravagant wardrobe

because she did her dressing so well, paradigm for her general m.o. She always looked fabulous, even in a housedress. God in the details, the dress was bandbox-crisp. Yes, she did things well, including making sandwiches, komish bread, crabapple jelly and conversation. She sang and knit and acted, and was a terrific teacher of all these disciplines. To sing, breathing had to come from *here*, she would say, digging her hand into her torso at a point halfway between the navel and breastbone. Great sandwiches needed mayonnaise on the tomato side and a bit of her homemade hot mustard on the roast beef side. Clothing should always be a little loose (except of course for that black slinky dress).

Some of the messages of comfort I've received since my mother died—especially from people who didn't know her—mention that she must have had characteristics which shaped my work. I think so. She had the time to be a perfectionist where I do not (or at least that's my excuse). But she was impressively liberal in her thinking (except for her intolerance of bad manners or bad grammar). She really believed, and said, that "Just because it's different doesn't mean it has to be wrong," an adage that I think has enabled me to tolerate, even encourage, social change. She was very accepting of the unconventional choices people made, even if those people were her own children. And the rule about loose clothing extended into other aspects of life. As a tenet of faith she believed that "You must always leave a little room," whether for disagreements or dessert. She never closed the door on relationships, had no lifelong enemies, and hated opinions too tightly held. She also hated tight schedules, imploring me, "Dear, always leave yourself a little room in the day. Try to overestimate how long it will take you to get there." Though she was patently right, that lesson didn't stick.

The whole family had an extraordinary opportunity to reminisce about Zora as we tried to prepare the rabbi to deliver a eulogy for a woman he'd never met. My brother talked about Mother's voice, and I recalled her translation of the I.L. Peretz story "A Woman's Wrath" for Lilith's premier issue. And her two older granddaughters informed us that Nana had ripped out their knitting by the foot, not unkindly but with the absolute certainty that no one would leave in stitches that were less than perfect.

It was good to have this very lively, sometimes funny conversation the night before the funeral, about the person she had been for 80 years, our talk a necessary, celebratory counterweight to the vigil I'd been keeping over her quiet and diminished self. In her last days, I sat at her bedside in Winnipeg's Jewish nursing home, trying to do what the compassionate nurses told me to: hold her hand and talk to her of pleasant things. I smiled and talked and tried to sing on key, so as not to offend her perfect pitch. All while I was weeping silently into her bedsheet.

I'll miss her immensely, and I think it will take me years to forgive the person who spoke unintentionally hateful words to me at her funeral. "Her death was a blessing," he said. It wasn't, except in the sense that as far as we know she didn't suffer. It was her life that was the blessing, and I shall miss her, of course, forever.

Susan

—Susan Weidman Schneider

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple...The Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal because we are created from the same earth."

—from The Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b

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"The Voices of Women." Traditionally, the voice of the Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. No more. These pages are for news about Jewish women, in our own strong voices.

No Jews Need Apply to Women's Rights Gathering

Did we all share the fantasy that Arab women and Jewish Israeli women could "do peace" better than the guys at Camp David? Dream on. An international conference on Female Sexuality was scheduled to take place in Turkey this fall as a forum for discussing women's rights and sexuality issues in the Middle East. But after a number of Arab women threatened to boycott if any Jewish Israelis came, the conference was officially "postponed." (This was before the current unrest.)

Hosted by Women for Women's Human Rights, a Turkish group, and by the New York-based International Women's Health Coalition, the conference was in the planning stages in July when the ruckus began. Marilyn Safir, an Israeli feminist and professor of psychology at the University of Haifa, was disinvited by two organizers. As remarkable as this turn of events was the friendly and matter-of-fact tone of their late-July letter.

Dear Dr. Safir,
Leyla has just attended another meeting in London on sexuality and customary practices in Muslim countries before coming to Istanbul. There she has learned from the Arab participants that, given the most recent developments in Camp David and the lack of agreements reached between Israel and Palestine, there is currently an atmosphere of tension and we were told that the Arab participants to our own sexuality meeting would boycott the meeting in finding out that participants of Jewish-Israeli background were also coming....

Under these conditions, we are very sorry to inform you that we will not be able to invite you for this particular meeting....We would like to repeat that we are extremely sorry for any inconvenience we may have caused and we thank you for your understanding in this difficult situation....

Sincerely yours,
Pinar Ilkkaracan and
Leyla Gulcur

Safir, a long-time women's activist, didn't take it lightly. Recruiting the help of her feminist allies in Israel, the United States and elsewhere, she launched a campaign to protest her exclusion. To Ilkkaracan and Gulcur, she wrote:

Under Arab pressure, a Jewish-Israeli feminist is disinvited.

I can not express my disappointment to you. I have been working and cooperating on various projects with Female Palestinian partner[s] for the past 3 years—from both Al-Quds (Jerusalem) and An Najaq (Nabulus) Universities We have been meeting and working together in spite of the problems that exist....I think the attitude of the women who refuse to come is counter productive....I have attend[ed] several conferences where such threats have been made and the conference organizers have not given in to pressure. I want to and am prepared to work together and to demonstrate that women are above this type of behavior. I ask you again to reconsider your decision.

In sisterhood, Marilyn

Dear Dr. Safir,
We have not claimed that you are not able to work with Palestinians or Arab women. In fact, as you might know, it is very often the case that Palestinians do not have any problem attending the conferences with Israelis, but the citizens of other Arab countries do....[A]s it is, the Middle East is largely Arab, and most of the women who will be attending the meeting are Arabs.

In that context, we were not able to understand what you mean by "giving in to pressure," as there is no sense in attempting to have a meeting that will not be attended by most of the participants.

I hope you will understand that insisting that we should take "another" stand on this issue could also be described as "pressure," only one from a different/your perspective.

Our mistake was being uninformed and naive about the level of emotions regarding the issue and sending out the invitations without having checked it before.

That is completely our mistake and we apologize once more for it.

Pinar Ilkkaracan and
Leyla Gulcur

Safir contacted the Anti-Defamation League, the Turkish ambassador, the Israeli consul in Istanbul in hopes of reversing the decision, and still was optimistic that she would be able to attend what she expected would "prove to be an important meeting as there will be discussions about the infringement of Human Rights as related to female sexuality." But, she reflected, "excluding a group because they are a minority in the Middle East does not bode well for human rights organizations."

In the end, according to Safir, the IWHC's president, Adrienne Germain, called her with apologies, and then informed her that the conference had been postponed, though Germain has told LILITH that she hopes to reschedule the meeting when it becomes possible to develop a "dialogue of trust." Reflecting on the experience to the Israel Feminist Forum list-serve, Safir wrote, "My aim was *not* to have the conference cancelled as I think that it is a very important topic. Rather, I wanted to create an awareness of the discriminatory nature and the [politicization] of a meeting that was to cross over boundaries."

—Sarah Blustain

A Sexual Bill of Rights in a Nursing Home!

Old they may be, but the residents of The Hebrew Home for Aged at Riverdale still want sex, intimacy and privacy. And the Home wants to help them. In an innovative document, formally called "Policies and Procedures Concerning Sexual Expression at the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale," the Home has created what amounts to a sexual bill of rights for its seniors.

The document, which was created through the efforts of staff, residents and their family members, reiterates respect for the "importance of emotional and physical intimacy" and offers residents certain rights (provided intimate acts are conducted by those who are of both age and ability to consent and do not have negative impact on the residents or staff). These include the right to "seek out and engage in sexual expression"; to access material with sexually explicit content; to have access to "facilities, most notably private space, in support of sexual expression"; to access professional counseling related to sexual expression.

"A good relationship with any person is almost better than any medicine," comments Nelson Burrous, director of Resident Support Programs. "Riverdale has the attitude that if you as a senior are interested in intimacy and closeness, let us support you in that as long as it's consenting and no harm is done."

To this end, the bill of rights encourages staff to help elders find the resources and privacy they need, and commits the Home to helping make such arrangements: a private room for one member of a couple, for instance, and regular sensitivity training for staff. Key to this policy, says Burrous, is the understanding of sexuality as a "right," not a "behavior." The Home's attitude is "How can we support them?" rather than "What can we do about it?" And the Home hopes to help other residences replicate its work with a soon-to-be-available training video and manual.

Such a policy sometimes makes for tricky ethical and personal situations, Home executives admit. Staff who for religious or personal reasons are uncomfortable helping arrange for private rooms or other facilities, for instance, may be excused from these responsibilities. In cases where the elder is cognitively impaired, a designated family member may be called in to consult. What happens if an elderly man thinks the woman he is involved with is his wife, when in fact she is not? Sometimes, says Burrous, the families want the couple separated, and the Home supports that; other times family members want their elder relative to be happy, even if the person doesn't realize the nature of his or her mistake. If a man believes that the woman he is involved with truly is his wife, Burrous says, it may be too traumatic to separate them.

—Sarah Blustain with Nina Owen

Million-Dollar Effort to Promote Women

The newly created Trust for Jewish Philanthropy announced this fall that its first initiative would be to address the barriers that have created a "dramatic imbalance" for women in Jewish leadership.

With $1 million in seed money from philanthropists Barbara and Eric Dobkin, longtime supporters of LILITH, the New York-based project—entitled "Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community"—will confront what those involved are calling a "glass ceiling." It will try to offer women as many opportunities in Jewish communal life as they have found in other fields.

"[W]omen are now seeking and increasingly finding access to high-level professional posts in every arena," a report about the project noted. "By contrast, there are virtually no women occupying senior levels of professional leadership in numerous sectors of the Jewish community."

Indeed, of 41 national Jewish organizations surveyed, only five had women presidents, according to a 1997 study commissioned by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC on the Upper West Side, another Dobkin creation. Shifra Bronznick, a change management consultant who has worked on the Trust's new project, notes that of the largest 47 Jewish Federations, only two have women at the helm. The Trust is a creation of the Federations, under the umbrella of United Jewish Communities.

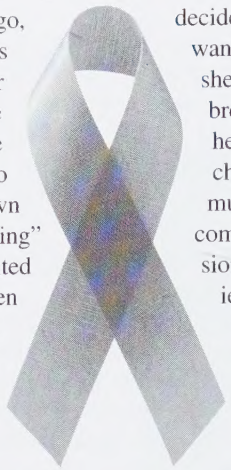
The new project will involve several different initiatives: an outreach effort to identify possible women leaders and offer them mentoring, coaching and training; assistance to Jewish organizations in recruiting and advancing women; a "Leadership Corps" for training men and women; and an annual collection of data on the status of women in Jewish leadership, to monitor progress.

For the past six year, LILITH has maintained its own Talent Bank of Jewish women. This database of more than 500 names has been tapped by hundreds of callers during that time—testimony to just how starved the Jewish world is for talented Jewish women.

—SB

Breast Cancer, Five Years After BRCA1 and 2

My mother had breast cancer nine years ago, and ever since has been suggesting to my sister and me that we acknowledge that her cancer could have been genetic. Did we want to be responsible for our own health care and "do something" about it? Frankly, no. I wanted to forget what we had been through and get on with life. It came, we saw, we conquered. The end.



However, recent scientific discoveries are increasing our understanding of the development of breast cancer in Ashkenazi women such that we may now choose to find out about our own possible genetic pre-disposition. Knowledge being power, I am now ready to admit that I might be able to monitor the possible behavior of my genes.

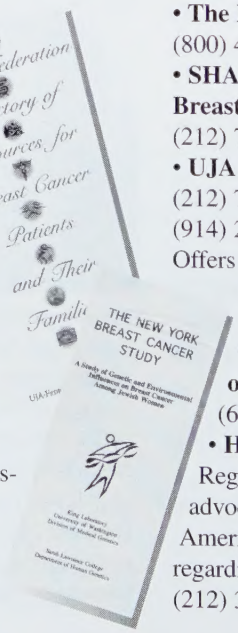
Five years ago, scientists discovered three genetic mutations leading to breast cancer. Their prevalence in Ashkenazi women is a consequence of the history of the Jews of Eastern Europe who, through voluntary and forced breeding restrictions, caused the concentration of these mutations.

Today, there is a growing body of genetic counseling and testing available, including the New York Breast Cancer Study (NYBCS), whose mandate is to study the incidence, development, and possible prevention of breast cancer in Ashkenazi women. At the Third Leadership Conference on Jewish Women's Health Issues sponsored by the American Jewish Congress and other Jewish organizations in New York this fall, Jewish women gathered for personal and scientific updates around the theme, "Five Years Later—What Have We Learned?"

Though the genetic mutation appears in only 2% of the Ashkenazi population, that number is significantly higher than in the general American public. The women at the conference expressed various reasons for deciding to use the new technology. One woman's mother, sister and aunt had all died of breast cancer; although she had already decided not to have children, she wanted to know for sure whether she was a carrier. Another had had breast cancer and, for the sake of her daughters and her brother's children, wanted to know if the mutations ran in her family. A common desire behind their decision to participate in genetic studies: an expressed wish to help fill in the genetic jigsaw puzzle and increase knowledge for the whole community.

As of the September conference, the NYBCS had tested and counseled 870 women of Jewish ancestry; their goal is to test 1,000 women by 2001.

A person who is considering genetic testing (women and men can be carriers) can approach a counselor for a discussion of the issues and to better understand her own situation. There are some 2,000 genetic counselors, most of them women, practicing in the United States and Canada. They will discuss personal and family medical history and risk factors. They will talk about the woman's risk of developing breast cancer and the likelihood of her passing the mutation to her children. Some questions that might arise: Do I want to know the results of this test? Do I want my children to know? What's involved in getting screened? Should I consider prophylactic surgery? "It can be a very difficult decision to have genetic testing," warns one genetic counselor, Karen Eanet, of the Harvey Institute for Human Genetics in Baltimore, "because it does not always give a clear-cut, yes-or-no answer."



Fear of repercussions from insurance companies has kept some people from getting tested, although so far there appears to be no bias in the insurance industry. Nevertheless, some groups are pressing for laws against potential discrimination.

Thirty-six states have legal protections, and over the past five years there has been a drive to strengthen federal law. The Coalition for Genetic Fairness, Hadassah and other groups have been advocating for new laws, including "The Genetic Nondiscrimination in Health Insurance and Employment Act of 1999," a bill making its way through congressional committees.

The information intrigues, excites and scares me. Do I really want to know what my genes may reveal? What are the implications for my future children? Like curly hair, or a preference for 7-Up over Coke, our genes define our lives while posing a latent threat precisely because they are unknown. The opportunity now exists to investigate the health of our inner wiring. I for one, am cautiously curious.

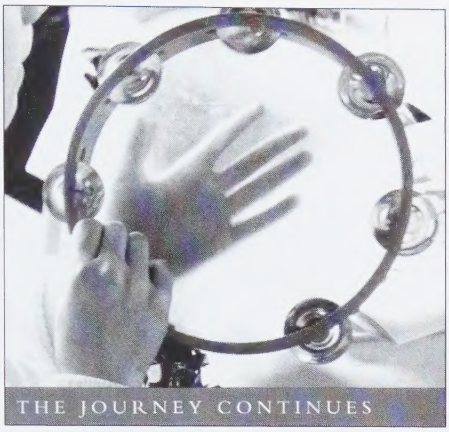
—Nina Owen

For more information:

- **New York Breast Cancer Study:** Jessica Mandell, research coordinator and genetic counselor (914) 395-2239; (732) 651-1094
- **American Jewish Congress—Commission for Women's Equality** (212) 360-1548
- **The National Cancer Institute** (800) 4-CANCER (422-6237)
- **SHARE: Self-Help for Women with Breast or Ovarian Cancer** (212) 719-0364
- **UJA Federation Resource Line** (212) 753-2288; (516) 654-9339; (914) 271-2121
  Offers a "Directory of Resources for Breast Cancer Patients and Their Families."
- **The National Society of Genetic Counselors** (610) 872-7608; www.nsgc.org
- **Hadassah**
  Regarding legislation and advocacy: (212) 303-8136 or AmericanAffairs@hadassah.org; regarding genetic testing: (212) 303-8094 or www.hadassah.org.

Reporting on Jewish women's health issues made possible by the Jewish Women's Foundation of New York.

Feminist Seders Become a Tradition



DETAIL FROM THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

From the initial living room gatherings of the 1970s, feminist seders have grown to a national phenomenon. According to new estimates by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC on the Upper West Side, as many as 18,000-20,000 people—primarily women—are attending women's and feminist seders each year.

Ma'yan, whose own series of feminist seders featuring Jewish folk singer Debbie Friedman draws more than 2,000 people each year, has sold some 12,000 copies of its feminist *haggadah, The Journey Continues*. And, says Ma'yan's special events director, Ruth Silverman, there are many more seders and *haggadot* being created by other organizations and individuals. At the Ma'yan library, there are some 30 feminist/women's *haggadot*—just the tip of the iceberg—some of them professionally published and many more put together by local women's groups.

These seders, generally held before the actual Passover date, offer women the opportunity to reflect on their own liberations and enslavements and often feature group singing, dancing, poetry, female God-language, social activist programming and other innovations that might not make it into the traditional dining-room ceremony. They also have inspired women to look for other feminist innovations for *Rosh Hodesh* (New Moon celebrations), Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah and other holidays. Women, says Silverman, who interviews seder organizers for feedback, "are hungry for women's programming."

While these innovative seders have drawn enthusiasm, they have also caused controversy in some communities that are resistant to this level of change. In one Connecticut community, the federation that organized the seder locked horns with the local board of rabbis objecting to feminine God-language. In a Pennsylvania community, according to Silverman, a rabbi denounced the woman organizer of a feminist seder from the pulpit. (She's organizing again this year anyway, we hear.)

Often, says Silverman, the seders are collaborative efforts between Jewish community centers, synagogues and/or branches of women's organizations like the National Council of Jewish Women. There are several college Hillels that run feminist seders, and at Dickinson College an individual professor has been organizing her own for about 100 students each year. Mostly, Silverman says, these occasions draw no men. —*SB*

To find out more about the Ma'yan seders and haggadah, call (212) 580-0099. For a history of women's seders since the 1970s, see Maida E. Solomon's essay "Claiming Our Questions" in Joyce Antler's book Talking Back *(Brandeis University Press).*

To order Lilith's packet of innovative seder ideas ...
or
To order copies of Lilith Magazine in bulk for your Rosh Hodesh group or feminist seder ...

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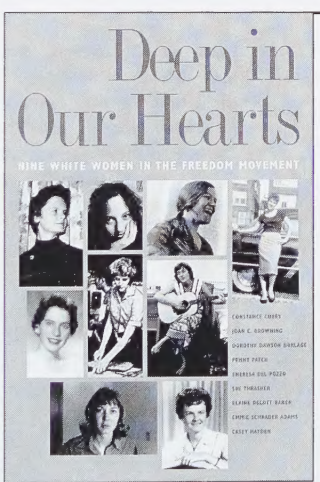

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Surviving Suicide

I lost my husband nine months ago. Another woman lost her teenage son. One woman lost her sister. Two women lost their fathers when they were children and didn't learn until decades later how. These losses were all suicides, and I meet my fellow suicide survivors at a monthly "drop-in" support group, *M'kom Shalom*: A Place of Peace for Jewish Survivors of a Close One's Suicide.

One of many bereavement groups offered by the National Jewish Healing Center (all co-led by a rabbi and a social worker), this particular one is led by the Center's director, Simkha Weintraub, who is both rabbi and social worker. When someone new comes, and we all introduce ourselves again, he shares that he lost an aunt to suicide. Strangely, it turns out a few of us have lost aunts to suicide too.

Aside from the individual therapy most of us are engaged in, there are few other places in our lives where we can come together to talk about the taboo subject of suicide. Together we are trying to put together the puzzle pieces of our losses and our lives. Do we blame ourselves? What is the legacy of suicide? How do we break through what seems like a conspiracy of silence erasing our loved one's life and death? How at the same time do we protect our privacy? How do we nurture our own healing? How do we cope with the anxiety that our loss provokes for others? How will we memorialize the person we lost?

Because we're different members of the family in relation to the suicide, we learn the emotional terrain, a vocabulary of sorrow that enlarges our own experience and helps us imagine what our siblings, spouses, children, parents, in-laws, may be going through. I listen with particular interest when a woman says with a still-fresh sense of indignation how she could not understand how her mother could make a huge Passover seder (in her mind, a big party) right after her father's death. I, mother of three, have just done this myself. I describe my therapist's image: that a suicide is like an airplane crash where the black box cannot be retrieved.

GOUACHE BY CHARLOTTE SALOMON. COURTESY THE JEWISH MUSEUM

Painter Charlotte Salomon lost her grandmother, aunt and mother to suicide before she herself was murdered in Auschwitz at 26. Through March 25, Salomon's autobiographical gouaches, "Life? Or Theatre?," are on exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York.

The term "survivor" has a special meaning in post-twentieth-century Jewish life. In the context of our group it telegraphs a special message when a Holocaust survivor relative tells a participant that this death by suicide is a holocaust. A suicide is like a holocaust in a survivor's life. Our losses are worthy of that terrible label.

Recently a new book was published, *Lay My Burden Down: Unraveling Suicide and the Mental Health Crisis Among African Americans.* A friend asks me, why does it make a difference what ethnic or religious group you belong to? I know that every group has its own collective traumas and ways of coping that affect our individual struggles. Our monthly group is a place for our specifically Jewish questions and answers. Suicide challenges our ideas about the value of life and our own resiliency. Whether or not we consider ourselves "religious," our lives—even sometimes our very ability to get up out of bed every morning—are informed by the cultural meanings we attribute to our activities, our relationships and our sense of place in the world.

There are those of us who are fortunate enough to be enmeshed in the particularistic Jewish tradition of belonging to synagogue communities, where we count in a *minyan*, and count on a *minyan* to be there for us, where people have been taught traditions of mourning and comforting mourners, and where a mantra-like liturgy gives ever-repeating expression to shifting feelings of sadness, hope, fear and gratitude. Sometimes we're disappointed when we expect too much from our religious community. Sometimes we are angry at God. This Jewish support group gives us a context in which to understand our expectations and comforts, our pains and frustrations.

Some of us, like me, come to this group as queens of wishful thinking, for whom denial is a defense mechanism that helps us to function rather well. I come to be reminded, in doses I can handle, that something terrible really did happen to me and my family, even though I prefer to think of my life as having been—and somehow continuing to be—extraordinarily wonderful and lucky.

—Naomi Danis

For more information about M'kom Shalom or any of the bereavement support groups of the New York Jewish Healing Center, please call (212) 399-2320 x 211.

Reporting on Jewish women's health issues made possible by the Jewish Women's Foundation of New York.

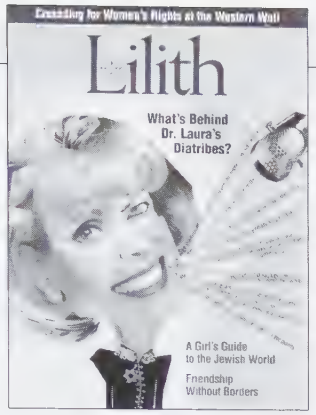
Wild About Laura

What's wrong with "Dr. Laura" is not, as Sarah Blustain asserts, that she is "promoting the agenda of the Christian Right" ("The Stealth Politics of Laura Schlessinger," Summer 2000). What's wrong with "Dr. Laura" is that she violates the central tenet of all religions, The Golden Rule: Do unto others, as you would have others do unto you.

Her intemperate attacks on callers to her radio program, her rigid judgments, arrogant opinions, and out-of-context citations from the Old Testament make her the very embodiment of "the Devil quoting Scripture." Her claim that she dispenses advice not on psychological but on moral and ethical issues thinly camouflages the florid sadism she displays toward emotionally troubled people who desperately need genuine wisdom and empathic help and not more torture. Schlessinger's ratings are a testimony to the failure of managed healthcare that forces needy people to resort to so-called "experts" on the airwaves.

Joan Swirsky
Great Neck, NY

As a Jew and social worker I am confronted by two roads of thought about Dr. Laura. Granted she may be the most popular Jewish woman in America but she is *not* the voice of any branches of Judaism. She stands alone with her dogma. Secondly, she is not a professional mental health practitioner and does not follow any of the ethical standards professionals are charged with. So, what is she? Schlessinger is a woman dressed as a Jew so



that she stands out from the rest, offering her own snake-oil treatment for those who would not otherwise seek community mental health treatment. She is a gimmick that generates money into her own pockets without the best interest of human kind in mind.

Charles Wickham
Ann Arbor, MI

Eat your hearts out, you poor urban, urbane ladies of the left. She's fun, she funny, she's righteous and she's right. It just tickles me to see you all go ballistic over Dr. Laura. She's got more common sense in her little pinky than you have in your fat *tusches*. Sit around and pout over her popularity; your pique is my pleasure.

Herb Baker
Gloucester, MA

I wish to applaud and commend Sarah Blustain for her fact-finding, carefully analyzing the "politics" and background of Laura Schlessinger. I've yet to find a colleague in the field of mental health who has liked her approach and methodology.

Sholom Bloom, Ph.D.
West Hartford, CT

I really appreciated your insightful, well-written piece on Dr. Laura, in my opinion the worst representative of Jewish values in memory. It's true. She's the darling of the Christian Right, and she loves it. Ach, what a pig.

Damon Schwartz
Sacramento, CA

Are you sure your article should not be renamed "The Stealth Politics of Lilith Magazine?" Lets face it, you have a spin that wants to make everything Dr. Laura does wrong. Also, you missed chastising her for her main message which is to take personal responsibility for your actions instead of blaming everyone and everything else. I guess it's hard to spin that into evil so you just skip it.

Kelley Martell
Hayward, California

Yes, this coming from a gay man (brought up Christian, now just rather unreligious). While I've followed the Dr. Laura business from the early days, I didn't want to get involved in the angry voices, but I liked that you critiqued the "Doctor's" comments without doing name-calling and badmouthing, just sticking to facts.

The "Christian" Right and Dr. Laura are two big reasons why I and the majority of the gay community do not consider ourselves religious. It's easy to be soured on religion because of people who, at every gay event, show up with their "God Hates Fags" signs. Thank you again for your words; to count you as a supporter to the way I live my life is encouraging.

Bill Willis
Santa Clara, CA

Breaking Silence

As a psychotherapist with over 20 years experience working with survivors of sexual abuse, including clergy sexual misconduct, I applaud your commitment to speaking the truth ("More Allegations of Abuse by Rabbis," Fall 2000). The major reasons rabbis can continue to abuse are silence and non-action, especially from our religious leaders. By naming names, regardless of the charisma a religious leader may have, your words support those injured to know they are not "crazy" or alone.

The AIDS Act Up message told us SILENCE=DEATH. Silence in this area also creates a death for the abused. Their sense of safety, trust and well-being are damaged; self-worth and dignity are diminished; faith in their elders and God is shaken. As Judaism explores way of holding on to its followers, does it not make sense to hold our leaders accountable for creating places of safety, responsiveness, respect and dignity for all?

Jan Singer
Fox Point, WI

Wedding Plans

In your article, "A Counterproposal" (Spring 2000), you talk about feminists who have egalitarian relationships and yet are afraid to deconstruct the "white wedding thang." Well I want to let you know that you are not alone. Despite the fact that I am married (happily) for a little over a decade, I too see the problems with traditional marriage and weddings.

Most people take on the attitudes and actions of those closest to them. This is not always a bad thing, but can cause those in denial to lash out at those who refuse to think from the same commu-

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MARCHING AGAINST MOMA

BY LESLIE HOLLIS

The New York City Labor Day parade is a major family event. Kids running everywhere dripping ice cream. People carrying banners, balloons and flags. Lots of flags, bearing old familiar initials: UNITE, UAW, UFT and, more prominent this year, SAG, the striking screenactors' guild. There are firefighters, cops, autoworkers, garment workers, sheet metal workers. This year I was there for a smaller constituency: the museum workers. More to the point I was there to support my daughter, who had been striking against the Museum of Modern Art for four and half months.

The MoMA strike started in April, an effort of the curators, educators, librarians, film archivists, photographic services and bookstore employees. Their list of demands was short: a wage increase to meet the escalating cost of living in New York; a decent health care benefit package; and the installation of a union shop, meaning that all newly hired museum employees would be required to join the union or pay dues to them. Without this, a union has very little power when negotiating for their members.

JENNIFER MCCABE

MoMA strikers are not your typical union members. They are considered not artisans but arts workers who labor for love, not money. But with the economy booming and with the backing of its parent union, the United Autoworkers, the museum's Professional and Administrative Staff Association decided to stand up for a living wage.

In the early weeks, press coverage was subtly slanted in favor of museum management. On more than one occasion, The New York Times described the picketers as the "very well-dressed MoMA employees," as if picketing in their professional clothes was some indication of a frivolous exercise by elitist museum workers. I was also amazed at how many people walked right into the museum, past the picketers loudly chanting *"Don't go in!"* These were New York liberal types who travel by subway, wear sensible shoes and frequent lectures and concerts all over the city, folks who carry PBS tote bags and really should know better.

My daughter began getting up at 4 a.m. to turn truckers away from making deliveries to the museum. She got chummy with members of other unions like the cop and construction workers stationed on the block. One of the flag men on a construction crew was appalled at her salary. He told her if she ever got tired of the museum biz he could get her a job making $50,000 with terrific benefits plus overtime. She told him she would hold out a while longer for $30,000 and a

PROTESTING DR. LAURA'S BIAS

Attempts to foil Laura Schlessinger's anti-gay rhetoric and her new TV show this fall took a Jewish turn in large part thanks to the efforts of Robin Tyler, the national protest coordinator for stopdrlaura.com and longtime comic, producer and gay rights activist. In the name of Jewish Orthodoxy, Schlessinger has used her radio presence to promote an anti-gay and anti-woman agenda. Tyler was concerned that activists protesting Schlessinger "keep this on message. ... I wanted to make sure that there were representatives of Jewish people, gay and straight, so there wouldn't be a subliminal anti-Semitism" from anti-Schlessinger activists. She was also intent on staving off "a kind of misogyny. ... It's much easier to vilify women than men."

There's a six-foot poster of Schlessinger on Tyler's office wall—"the woman I've been living with for six months"—and the 58-year-old Tyler expresses her fight against Schlessinger's rhetoric as a "hidden battle between two very willful women. ... Here we have a woman whose parents, my parents, taught her 'never again.' And you have another women who is using the same language—'biological errors' —of the Nazis."

Activists launched a campaign to get advertisers to drop Schlessinger's broadcasts earlier this year after she called homosexuality "deviant" and "the result of a biological error." Her brand-new TV show, produced by Paramount, was quickly suspended and then downgraded to the 2 a.m. time slot in

decent health plan. After all, that master's degree should be good for something.

With public pressure building from artists, musicians and some politicians, negotiations started the night before the Labor Day parade. They talked through most of the night. We met across the street from the museum at 11 a.m., all of us wearing black for unity. The buttons we wore said "CONTRACT NOW." I waited with people I recognized from the picket line, with people from other locals who showed up to lend support, with veteran union people whose stories went back generations. I was thoroughly enjoying myself. Eleven o'clock came and went and the parade started without us.

At about 11:30 a stunning and excited young woman came out of the library and announced, "We won, we won and we got everything we asked for!" It took me a moment to realize this was my offspring. She looked so confident, in charge and actually taller. I got a serious hug and then she was surrounded by cheering supporters from the UAW, UNITE, the AFL-CIO, so many initials and buttons, so many new friends. We all changed our buttons from "CONTRACT NOW" to "CONTRACT *WON*" and joined the end of the parade. We marched with the transit workers and the autoworkers, between the salsa band and the garbage trucks. We got the thumbs up from people all along the way. One policeman quietly said congratulations and then asked, what's MoMA? We laughed, tired of explaining and besides, we'd won.

But what am I talking about? This wasn't my win. It was the union's win. It was my daughter's win. But I did get to watch a very special young woman grow in confidence and power. I had the pleasure of hearing her articulate not just what she wanted but what she was entitled to, speaking not only for herself but for a whole bunch of unknown people. No wonder I feel like I won.

CHALLENGING INCUMBENTS

It was a banner year for Jewish women political candidates, who in large numbers took on incumbents in Congress, though with mixed results. In a bid for Senate, Michigan Democratic congresswoman **Debbie Stabenow** unseated Republican Spencer Abraham (at half his cost) while stumping for a patient's bill of rights, lower prescription drug costs and protecting Social Security. In her campaign, she cited her legislative work on date rape, family violence and family leave, and appealed to women to vote for her "and e-mail at least five other women and ask them to do the same. ... When women work together, women win!" In House races: New Jersey, Democrat **Susan Bass Levin,** the mayor of Cherry Hill, lost her race against the Republican incumbent; and in Illinois, Democratic state representative **Lauren Beth Gash** lost a tight race (49%-51%) for the seat of a retiring Republican, citing her work in education, gun control, senior issues and women's issues. In Florida, Democratic state representative **Elaine Bloom** lost by 637 votes to Republican Clay Shaw, whom she scored for working with the NRA to block gun safety legislation and for his support of school vouchers. Bloom was founding chairperson of the Dade County Commission on the Status of Women and has been very active in Florida's Jewish community. Also in Florida, 48-year-old Democrat **Jean Elliott Brown,** new to politics, ran an aggressive and overtly Jewish (though ultimately unsuccessful) campaign that included, notably, a platform for "protecting the peace in Israel," "separation of church and state" and abortion rights. Brown was inspired to politics watching the impeachment of President Clinton, in which her opponent Mark Foley, a Republican, was

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Robin Tyler (left) protesting Laura Schlessinger (center).

many markets because of bad ratings and equally poor advertising.

What made the heavily grassroots StopDrLaura campaign a success? "In the good old Jewish tradition it was David versus Goliath," says Tyler. The campaign was done on a shoestring—$15,000, most of it raised from the sale of anti-Schlessinger tee-shirts—testimony to the powerful effect of online protests when paired with traditional activism. "We don't need to look for an organization to give us permission," says Tyler. "The web has given us permission to organize." The web site also helped neophytes to connect with experienced protesters to ask: "I've never been on the street before, how do I do this?"

Tyler hopes to use the momentum of the StopDrLaura campaign to develop a national rapid-response network around similar issues. Write to: rtstopdrlaura@aol.com.

—SB

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active. Her campaign gathered the support of Faye Wattleton, Abner Mikva, Senator Charles Schumer and others across the country. In California, two Democratic Jewish women took on Republican incumbents and won: **Jane Harman** and **Susan Davis.** On Long Island, 71-year-old attorney **Regina Seltzer,** a Democrat and longtime member of local government, made an unusual decision to run against an incumbent fellow Democrat in the primary. She beat Michael Forbes, a former Republican, claiming that he opposes abortion and gun control and "disagrees with so many core beliefs of Democrats that he is incapable of representing the Party." Seltzer, though, lost the election, as did Democrat **Jody Wagner** in a close race in Virginia.

Women's issues find proponents and funding.

* * *

One for **the Books?** Another candidate made history this year as the first Jewish woman to run for the vice presidential office when **Ralph Nader** selected **Winona LaDuke** as his running mate. Initial excitement quickly died down, however, as the left began to fear that their candidacy could in fact hand George W. Bush the presidency. LaDuke, a Native American activist, has credited her Jewish mother and grandmother for nurturing her activism. But when the national Jewish student magazine New Voices asked whether she considers herself Jewish, she said, "I consider that I come from Jewish ancestry."

* * *

Women's rights activists **were nervous** this year: The Violence Against Women Act was up for reauthorization and having trouble in the Senate. Programs protecting battered and disabled women were depending on **VAWA** money to survive; battered immigrant women also were looking to the act for hope. So a big hats-off goes to all the advocacy organizations that pushed through the legislation just before the close of this season's legislative session: National Council of Jewish Women, Hadassah, the American Jewish Committee, The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the Jewish Women's Coalition and others.

—SB

A **Step** Toward **Freedom?**

Amid political upheaval in Peru, efforts to free American journalist and activist **Lori Berenson** from a Peruvian prison may have taken a small step forward this season. A Supreme Military Council of Peru nullified her life sentence. This fall, the Peruvian government admitted that Berenson was never a leader of a terrorist group, that she should not have been tried by a military tribunal, that she was not guilty of treason, and, therefore, her life sentence was nullified. Berenson now faces a trial in civilian court, although most doubt that this trial will meet standards of due process or openness. Berenson still maintains her innocence.

Also this fall, **Rhoda Berenson,** Lori's mother, has just published a new book, *Lori: My Daughter, Wrongfully Imprisoned in Peru* (Context Books, www.contextbooks.com), with a forward by Noam Chomsky and an afterword by Ramsey Clark. Berenson, formerly a teacher, has worked non-stop with her husband for the past four and half years to free her daughter. See www.freelori.org.

What a Few Can Do

In a year when every vote counted, there were at least 800 new voters registered thanks to the living-room efforts of a handful of Jewish women in New York City. J-Vote was conceived by twenty-something **Erika Katske** and a few friends because of their "despair about all of the apathy we were seeing around us."

"A lot of Jews have participated in voter registration," commented Katske, "but I don't think a coalition of Jewish organizations has ever carried out a voter registration drive on its own."

Employed by a variety of Jewish organizations, these young women drew on their contacts to get the ball rolling. "This was a non-work thing," she said, "but we were able to use our work connections." Those connections included Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, where Katske is active, which hosted a pre-drive breakfast and a get-the-blood-going talk by **Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum**. Supporting organizations also included the JCC on the Upper West Side, the American Jewish World Service, National Council of Jewish Women, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, the NYU Bronfman Center and Columbia University Hillel. When the women first approached these groups, says Katske, they all asked, "Why hasn't this been done before."

Kicking off the drive, Rabbi Kleinbaum reflected on the *halakhic* rule that a synagogue must have a window, which she explained was a mandate for Jews to be involved in their communities. The group is hoping J-Vote "become a place for New York Jews to become part of political debate." Contact Jvote2000@hotmail.com, Rsweder@jccnyc.org or read a profile of them on www.socialaction.com. *—SB*

SEX WORKERS UNITE!

BY SARAH BLUSTAIN

From "Live Nude Girls Unite!," filmed at the Lusty Lady.

Julia Query and I are wandering through a brick housing complex built by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in Manhattan. Query, who needs a set of keys to get into an apartment to get her luggage to leave for her flight back to California in 45 minutes—long story—is blissed out. Out on the sidewalk, she coos at an elderly man in a union hat. In the complex's administrative offices, she coos over photos of New York labor leaders and the handsome Jack Kennedy at labor events. At the front desk, she tells the woman who may hold the keys, "I'm a labor organizer."

But identity is a tricky thing. With her babydoll top and three-inch heels she doesn't look much like a typical labor organizer. And with her feminist attitude and equally feminist ideology, she doesn't look much like a sex worker. *And* with her sex workers' union tee-shirt and multiple facial pierces, she doesn't look like a "nice Jewish girl." And yet it becomes clear once the apartment is opened and she downs half a vat of whitefish salad with a *kugel* chaser—left for her with a goodbye note from her mother—that Julia Query is all of these.

Query's most recent role is filmmaker, which she wears well as she promotes her popular documentary "Live Nude Girls Unite!" at openings across the country. The film tells the story of Query's own time as a dancer at a San Francisco club—the day job she took to support herself as a comic—and of her successful efforts to turn the Lusty Lady into the first-ever unionized sex club in the country. It follows the women in an industry that, increasingly, is staffed by educated women—students, artists, mothers—looking to make a living wage in flexible hours.

"It's a real win in this country right now when anybody organizes a union," Query says, "so when a group of stigmatized workers, *female* workers, do it, it's a miracle."

The movie walks us through the dimly lit world of the Lusty Lady and into the dawn of a new age: unionized sex work. At the same time, filmed mainly with a hand-held camera by Query herself, it follows the unhappy process as she reveals her line of work to her mother. This drama holds great irony: Query—born into a "family of do-gooders" and raised "to be the kind of Jew who fought for social justice"—is the daughter of a physician, Joyce Wallace, who has devoted herself to crusading for the rights and safety of New York City prostitutes.

Filmmakers Vicky Funari and Julia Query

Query's union effort began at the Lusty Lady over many issues: no sick leave, scheduling of dancers based on race and breast size (seems the busty blonde still wins out), arbitrary firings and docking of pay, and videotaping by customers for porn sights. The workers' effort was supported by the Service Employees International Union and by long-time club patrons who refused to cross the picket line.

Still, says Query, when news of the unionization broke, newscasters who announced it did so "with a smirk. And it was that smirk," she says, "it was the bad puns, that just sent us over the edge. When we unionized, people didn't just jump up and say, 'Wow, strippers are organizing a union, that must mean strippers are workers.' People laughed and they made jokes and because they laughed and made jokes, we felt insulted, and I felt inspired to make our story."

Still, for all her pride in union work and movie work, it's clear that being a stripper—she's still at it five years later—and talking about it, are hard on a college-educated, Jewish woman who really wants to be an artist. Her mother's judgments hang over the film, and over the conversation. "I don't think she'll ever really accept me for doing sex work," Query reflects. "She fought so hard to go to medical school at a time when women weren't accepted in medical schools, at a time when women were getting jobs based on their looks and that was just acceptable, ... so of course she feels a real pain that her daughter is now an object for strange men's gaze. And I feel for her on that. I do. And sometimes I don't like it, either."

For information on the film, tee-shirts or organizing a union shop, visit www.livenudegirlsunite.com.

The "Illegitimate" Daughter Tells Her Birth Mother's Story

by Michele Kriegman

"MEXICAN DOLL," BY JOYCE STOLAROFF

The woman who gave birth to me did so in a very different age. It was the 1960s, and my arrival was what would now be called an out-of-wedlock birth. At the time the language was firmer: I was "illegitimate." That label meant that the woman who gave me life could never be called simply, "mother." Nor the even jauntier-sounding "single mom" (which is what I have become since my divorce). She would almost always, if she were middle-class and white, be forced to surrender her child to adoption. Then she was a "biological mother" or a "birth mother," at best, and a few cruder terms from less sympathetic lips. My search for words is part of a larger search to understand the woman who gave me away and who 30 years later spoke to me, her only child, for the first time.

The term birth mother is deceptive: her journey neither began nor ended with the birth, despite society's efforts to that end. Adoption agencies counseled these women to "get on" with their lives and, most of all, forget. Instead of forgetting, many of these women suckled a ghost-child in their hearts for years. They never received recognition from society as mothers who had suffered what was a terrible, terrible loss. These women were forced to hide everything: their names, their pregnancies, their sexual experience, their affection for their newborn children and, sometimes, for the birth fathers as well.

Today, the tide of secrecy is turning. Social and economic change, and feminism, have meant greater open-

ness in talking about, and pursuing, single motherhood. So, too, grassroots efforts by birth mothers, adoptees, adoptive parents and others are reversing laws that tried to erase "shameful" pregnancies and birth mothers from their children's pasts by sealing adoption records. By the time you read this article, several more states will have restored adoptees' access to their authentic birth certificates. While paving the way for more humane adoptions today, these new attitudes and laws also reopen those histories that were closed for decades, giving adoptees like myself unprecedented, and sometimes longed-for, access to our birth mothers. And yet, as the tide of secrecy recedes, it reveals a very rocky residue as well.

When a Nice Jewish Girl Got Pregnant

As the rights of adopted people work themselves out in the courts, I have been watching with intense investment. I have wanted to ask many questions. To those birth mothers who have sued to keep their histories locked, I have wanted to ask from the safety of the 21st century, *if you never wanted to see your child, why didn't you just get an abortion?* To the other mothers, fighting for the right to know their children, I want to ask, *why, if you still care even now, did you give your child away?*

Bill Betzen, a long-time child placement social worker who helps run www.openadoption.org, explained "they really couldn't say 'yes' to adoption with their whole hearts if there was no real option to say 'no.'" The stories birth mothers tell have variations, but in the end, walking the line between coercion and choice, they agreed to give up their babies.

What was it like? Once upon a time in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, a nice, single Jewish girl got pregnant. Perhaps she had a shot-gun wedding, but that wasn't an option for a Jewish girl who had conceived with a man of another religion or race. Perhaps she took a short "vacation," accessing a safe, legal abortion outside the country (if she could afford it) or a dangerous, illegal one here in the States. More often than not, however, she "went to live with an aunt." That meant she was sent away from her friends and family for several months to have her baby among strangers. She could only return after the baby was born or died, but most importantly, this mother was to return with empty arms.

The pressure to accede to this third option was intense. Carol Whitehead, who did disappear to a home for unwed mothers, remembers later meeting a woman who had been at the same home in the 1950s. "She was a minor and [she and the father] both wanted to keep the baby. Her parents took the matter to court to force the issue. They had a judge force her to a maternity home and force her to relinquish her child. Years later she obtained the papers the judge wrote...and found in there that the decision was based on her 'fornicating with a Negro.'"

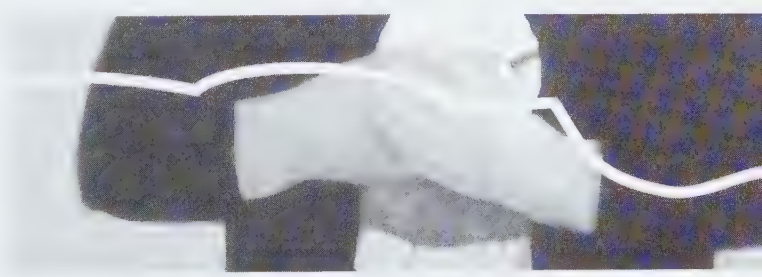
My own birth mother, Helen*, did not go to a maternity home but stayed with her own mother, where she says she felt much of the same shame and pressure to give up her child. "It is horrible being dumped by a man, and traumatic to lose a child and to be on the wrong side of society," she told me after our reunion. The adoption agency made her feel like there were no other options. "I wish they had counseled us that we could rebel. Instead, it was all laid out. We were told we wouldn't be able to juggle."

Whitehead, who was single, pregnant and 18 in 1963, went to the Lakeview Home for Jewish Unwed Mothers in Staten Island, affiliated with the Louise B. Wise Adoption Agency. It was one of a string of such homes set up by Jewish philanthropic organizations during the 20th century. The girls under 18 had daily classes. Those over 18 joined knitting tables, crocheting tables, embroidery tables and played endless games of cards. They were told not to reveal their last names to the other residents of the home. They could receive visitors only on Sundays, and their phone calls were screened, according to Whitehead. They were never left unattended with a gentleman caller. They heard frequent lectures on hygiene, but received none on childbirth, nor on alternatives to relinquishing their babies.

"It was like reform school for girls," Whitehead remembers. "They made us feel worthless while we were there, and we left empty-handed. We were taught that we were not good enough to be mothers."

Small acts of rebellion were not uncommon, for at least some of the girls were reluctant participants in these relinquishment schemes. At Lakeview, Whitehead made a point of wearing her high school letter jacket. "We were forbidden to disclose our identities to other residents. I was known as 'Carol 2' because 'Carol 1' had her baby and left the home just before I arrived. One day I wore my high school jacket and another resident said I'd get in trouble because people would be able to look me up. She was going to report me. Inwardly I smiled, it was important that my identity was known. It was my intention to leave the broadest physical and paper trail."

Another part of the ruse were the fake wedding rings that the older women who ran the homes provided their



I want to ask, "why did you give your child away?"

charges for those times they needed to leave the home. This was a widespread practice and one that was received with mixed response. To Whitehead, they were simply part of the demeaning charade. In contrast, Judy*, who was raised Catholic and may have seen her own sexual explorations in terms of "sin," appreciated the gesture at the home she went to. "The maternity home, run by nuns...was a warm community," she recalls, "and they provided us with wedding bands so we felt free to travel outside."

When labor began, birth mothers were rushed to a hospital alone. Maternity ward staff, mostly Christians, often viewed them as sinners and treated them coldly. Judy recalls "the other three women in my room were brought their babies. I had to buzz and buzz and buzz. Finally a nurse came in and said, 'Oh, you want your baby?' in a harsh tone. I glared back at her and said, 'Yes, my husband's in the service.'"

After birth mothers returned from the maternity home, they were supposed to resume their lives, eventually get married, and have other children to keep. They were instructed not to look each other up later. They were not even supposed to tell their gynecologists and their spouses about this chapter of their lives. They never met the couple that would raise their flesh and blood, and many a woman, like my birth mother, never even saw the child she had just delivered. Neither Jewish law nor Jewish compassion provided the right words and symbols for birth mothers. No one ever invited a birth mother to say *kaddish* for the child she lost through adoption.

Birth mothers were also deliberately deceived. Adoption placement workers could tell birth parents and adoptive parents whatever they wanted because adoption records were sealed in most states for at least part of the 20th century. My birth mother was told, no, she couldn't hold me because I had been adopted immediately after birth. In fact, as I found out from hospital records, I was still down the hall in the newborn nursery long after she was discharged. She was told that I would be raised in Pennsylvania by an Orthodox couple. In fact, I was raised in New Jersey by an interfaith pair. My adoptive parents, in turn, were never told by the agency in the 1960s that I was part American Indian lest they decide not to adopt me. They were also never told that my birth mother had already named me: "Suzanne." (Today agencies tend to adhere

Why Should We Root for Open Adoption?

This past century in the United States is an anomoly in human history; from as early as the turn of the last century to as recently as the late 1970s, all states but Kansas and Alaska passed legislation to seal adoptees' birth certificates and other adoption records. Adoption records were sealed to the public and, more unusually, to the adoptee, the adoptive parents and the birth parent. That secrecy was intended to shield birth mothers from the stigma of out-of-wedlock birth, to shield adoptees from the stigma of illegitimacy, and to shield adoptive parents from the stigma of infertility. Most adoptees were issued false birth certificates that erased the names of their biological parents and replaced them with the names of their adoptive ones.

In recent years, through legislative and judicial efforts across the country the tide has been turning against this walling-off of history. One key victory for this sea-change occurred in Oregon, where warring emotions played out in the battle over Measure 58, which was proposed in the mid-1990s to open adoption records. The courtrooms of Oregon became the setting for a drama that pitted the "right" to confidentiality of birth mothers against the "right" of adult adoptees to know their own heritage. The legislation was challenged by six anonymous birth mothers backed by a closed-adoption advocacy group, the National Council on Adoption. They claimed it violated promises of "confidentiality" made to birth mothers by adoption agencies. After several rounds in court, Measure 58 was upheld by the Supreme Court earlier this year.

At the center of the storm was an attorney named Fred Greenman. He was the counsel of record in the Oregon case, and only now, after the legal resolution, has he revealed publicly that he is a Jewish birth father—and that his biological daughter had found him. This situation gave him ironic empathy for his adversaries, the plaintiffs: "I guess they didn't want to face what my daughter put me through when she asked me point-blank, 'Why'd you dump me?'"

The initial confrontation with his daughter was awkward but seems to have changed him for the good: "I had insomnia for 30 years until my daughter found me. I thought it must be all sorts of anxieties about money and work, never my daughter. [Still,] you've got a child out there and you don't know if they're beaten up, raped, poor, addicted. So no wonder I've heard that most birth parents are clinically depressed until they're reunited."

Greenman believes follow-up surveys show that he, and not the Oregon plaintiffs, are in the majority. When birth parents were contacted through intermediaries in Tennessee, 95% of birth parents in closed adoptions agreed to being contacted. Bill Betzen, a child placement social worker who helps run the www.openadoption.org website, has found, "People change their minds. When the adoptee makes that first call instead of a mediator, the odds of her wanting to see her child go up from about 90% to 98%."

Both Greenman and Betzen warn birth mothers that today's promises of "openness" may prove as unenforceable as yesterday's promises of "confidentiality." The future good faith of adoptive parents matters more than the promises of contact they make to convince a birth mother to surrender her child. —*MK*

more strictly to standards of truth and disclosure: when I visited my agency for information in 1992, they revealed this information readily.)

Often, two or three months after returning home, the women were called back to the adoption agency, where they discovered the reality. The child they had been forbidden to hold had not been adopted yet; their child had been in foster care all this time, as I was. Agencies kept children in foster care to see whether they developed "normally" before passing them to adoptive families. Only at this point were the mothers called back to sign what are called "relinquishment papers." Relinquishment documents allow a woman to waive her parental rights and transfer them to a private or public agency.

They are dry legal artifacts that only yield up their human drama on closer scrutiny. Carol Whitehead, when she found her 22-year-old son fifteen years ago, obtained a copy of his relinquishment papers. As she re-read them, she says she could feel the anger of patriarchy in the document's reason for asking her to give away her flesh and blood: "that I am unmarried; that I have never been married." She felt relinquishing her child was demanded of her as punishment for having had a child without a husband.

To me, as an adoptee, there is a more significant detail in that document. It explains why many adoptees are angry. On a relinquishment document there is room for one and only one signature, the birth mother's. I know many birth mothers and many, many adoptees who have found their birth mothers later in life, and the relationships that sometimes result are the most bittersweet I have ever seen. I include my relationship with my birth mother, too. Though a birth mother, like mine, might correctly come to blame her child's father, her mother, a supposedly unsupportive extended family, or society at large, at that moment, the moment of signing, the only person with complete and absolute power over the fate of the relationship is the birth mother herself. And almost none of them knew it at the time.

The High Price of Secrecy

Relinquished children, however, are not the only ones who suffered from the forced separation. For birth mothers, the ordeal did not end when they signed away their child. My own birth mother, years after my birth, joined a support group for women who wanted to explore their feelings around relinquishing a child. I asked her, How did this effect your life? Do you try to give it a meaning or just forget it? She also shared my questions with the group. Breda*, an Irish birth mother who has not located her child, wrote in reply, "I could never forget the experience or the pain." Helen wrote, "My life had been on hold. Completely blighted. Then believing [another] child would redeem me, I soon married my ex-husband...who it turned out didn't want children."

Several members of her group said the secrecy surrounding the adoption compounded their pain. Every birth mother I spoke with shared the sense that each lie she told to cover up the past seemed to pull her beyond uniqueness into a cold realm of alienation.

Judy describes the extent of her lies: "I remember my gynecologist asking if I'd had a baby and I said, 'no.'... People [at work] would ask where I'd been, so I'd lie. ... I didn't even tell my husband until eight years into our marriage. He was devastated. ... He wanted to go search for her the next day. I'd brought it up in the middle of a fierce argument. I told him it was past, I had closed the door on it and it didn't have any relevance to now ... but I could feel the old mantle of shame and guilt as I said it."

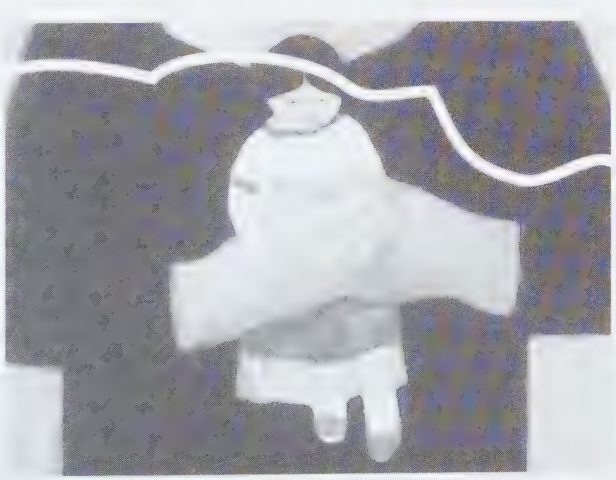
"In 1974," Judy explains, "a woman who is now a dear friend told me people were saying I'd had a baby. I put on a mask of honor and said, 'Gee, I wonder how stories like that get started.'... Twenty-five years later when I told [her], I was just stunned when she said, 'Judy, I know exactly what you're talking about. I have a son out there who I gave up 36 years ago.' "

Carol Whitehead felt she "had to pretend I was a 'virgin' at my wedding and it felt so ironic that I had already given birth. ... When my son Adam, the first child of my marriage, was born, my mother insisted on *pinyon ha-ben,*" a Jewish ceremony marking the birth of a first-born son.

For some women, the shame and secrecy have become almost habit. There are many more questions I would like to ask my birth mother. But I am halted by the secrecy that is now due to either the forgetfulness of three decades or her self-imposed silence.

And When You Tell the Truth . . .

Adoption will always be a necessary option for birth mothers who are very young, mentally ill, severely retarded, addicted, violently abusive or just plain unwilling or unable



"I had to pretend I was a virgin at my wedding."

to mother. But the era when it was almost the only option for everyone else has passed. Literally a sign of the times, the Spence-Chapin Adoption Agency in New York City has finally painted their name on the front door. They have formed an advisory committee of birth mothers to provide ongoing support for others and to humanize the relinquishment experience. They present lectures at clinics and maternity wards on sensitivity toward birth mothers. They coordinate a buddy system that pairs a woman who has relinquished her child with an expectant unwed mother. They also hold a Mother's Day ceremony that is commemorative, not celebratory. Today, they tell me the operative word is "openness."

One study by the Maine Department of Human Resources' Task Force on Adoption found in 1989 that every birth parent who was surveyed wanted to be found by the child they had placed for adoption. Of the adoptees surveyed, 95% expressed a desire to be found.

Still, the pursuit of a once-potent relationship is not easy, and relinquished children and their biological mothers don't always understand their shared history the same way. After my agency told me that "someone in your biological family has been trying to contact you," it took six months before I was ready for them to put me in contact with Helen. For those of us who have been found, both birth mothers and adoptees, it awakens feelings we didn't know we had and it re-awakens feelings we thought we had overcome. There's curiosity, loss, sorrow, joy, bewilderment and anxiety. There's also anger (why'd they wait so long?) and concern for how this will effect other family members.

Those who actively search have had to be emotionally prepared to find anything. During the years Mirah Riben searched for her daughter, she created a ritual of the heart, an expression of a birth mother's feelings so powerful that it spread by word of mouth among those of us in the adoption reform movement. She told of setting the seder table every year after finding and then being rejected by her daughter. As she got to setting out the cup of Elijah, she also set out a second cup in her heart for her missing daughter. Each is a guest who is always welcome, but who never attends. Her vigil came to a close a few years later when her daughter committed suicide. The adoptive parents did not notify her of their daughter's death, but women from Mirah's birth mother support group joined her at the gravesite to say *kaddish* for the daughter she lost twice. She says, "If your goal in searching is to find the truth, you will not be disappointed. But if you have preconceived notions, you will be."

For my own birth mother, I hope one of many happy endings to that era when motherhood was a secret is the blessing she was given at my eldest daughter's, her first grandchild's, bat mitzvah this summer. Helen flew from her home in London to attend. No longer hidden in shame, her face appears throughout our family's album of that event.

In one photograph, she stands in a multi-colored *tallit*, next to my adoptive father. But this photograph tells more than one story. The growing egalitarianism within and around the Jewish community that allows single mothers to keep their children is entwined with the egalitarianism that allows our daughters to study Torah. The openness that allowed me to introduce Helen to congregants as my birth mother also allowed a role in the ceremony for my ex-husband, an ethnic-Chinese Thai. It was simple for my daughter; she wanted the whole family there. For the rest of us, we had to swallow hard on our ambivalence about the changing definitions of family and tradition and just smile for the camera. ■

*These names have been changed on the request of the women they represent.

Michele Kriegman's day job is on the internet, where her words are called "content." In her free time she prefers to write for magazines, where words are called "prose."

Rosanne Gave Up Her Baby

On February 4th, 1999, the television host and sitcom star Roseanne Barr revealed on her talk show that she is a birth mother. Shedding her often caustic veneer, she brought on her biological daughter, Brandi, and Brandi's adoptive parents, Gail Nusinow and Stanley Brown. They all discussed the initial forced meeting, and then the development over the succeeding ten years.

The reunion was precipitated by the threat from a national tabloid to reveal Roseanne's secret if she refused to grant them an interview. Roseanne acted quickly and had a private investigator find her biological daughter's family before the tabloid could. The adoptive mother, Gail, prepared their daughter and then had the P.I. speak to Brandi directly. He explained to the then 18-year-old that her birth mother was famous. Brandi, who wanted to enter show biz herself and had been active in her synagogue choir, was elated. She already knew her birth mother was Jewish, and Brandi herself has blonde hair. She put two and two together, and asked, "Bette Midler?"

"No," replied the P.I.

She gasped, "Oh, my God! Barbra Streisand?!"

"No," he explained, "Roseanne."

Brandi paused, "She's Jewish?"

During the ten years since, Brandi and Roseanne have traveled together to places where Roseanne grew up and where their paths parted. Still, Roseanne confesses that she has "a lot of trouble connecting," and that sometimes navigating their various step-families is like a "minefield." She noted that the world has changed so much and that she wished she had lived a little bit later so she could have kept her child. "The guilt and shame of giving up one's own flesh and blood never goes away."

—*MK*

Secrets and Lies: The "Out-of-Wedlock" Son Finds Them Out

by David Siff

The author's history is a tangled web. After years of lies, he discovers he is the child of his mother's love affair, adopted—not conceived—by the man who raised him. Here, adapted from his new book, Eleanor's Rebellion, *he begins to uncover the betrayal that began it all.*

"THE CLAY VESSEL," BY JOYCE STOLAROFF

Nineteen seventy-five. I'm standing on another line. It's a clear winter day and the cold is still on my hands and face. The bare green walls and dirty marble floor, the clerks sitting behind cages, the people filing through the room, all of it triggers vague fantasies of Ellis Island at the turn of the century.

I can't really figure out why I've let myself in for this. I am utterly devoid of belief that I'll find my birth time. But it's become an obsession—for an astrology chart, of all things. It's been two weeks since I was here last to get the birth certificate that *didn't* contain the information I was looking for. I've taken the document out of my pocket countless times and read down the grained yellow page, line by line, name, mother's name, father's name, date of birth, place of birth, hospital, attending physician, and so on. Nothing. There are 1,440 minutes in twenty-four hours. One of those minutes on September 28, 1935 is mine.

The line moves slowly towards the clerk in the cage. I have my spiel ready when my turn comes. I tell her I want to know all about records pertaining to my birth that may be on file at this office. The clerk asks to see the document. I give it to her and watch her peruse it. A pause, a hiatus, something. The clerk suddenly holds the paper up, pokes a finger at it, and barks: "Who

gave this to you? You had no business getting this!"

I take the paper from her to see what it is she's trying to tell me. I look at the title. Where is the mistake? The words across the top, in large black Gothic letters are perfectly clear:

CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH

Then, suddenly I see it. In all the times I've read and reread this document, folding it, putting it away, taking it out, reading it over line by line again and again, I've somehow missed it every time. Two small words like a name in the phone book, in plain roman print, fly up at me like a bat out of a barn door:

By Adoption.

Nineteen thirty-five. My mother, Eleanor Segal, nineteen, discovered she was pregnant with me in her fourth month. She lived at home with her parents and two sisters in a comfortable but cramped apartment on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, near 163rd Street.

She grew to suspect she might be pregnant because she couldn't account for why she was gaining weight yet eating less and less. She was also moodier than usual.

My mother needed to see a doctor and knew only one, an uncle named Jacob, called Docky, who was a tuberculosis specialist. When she was sixteen, this uncle had tried to force himself on her. I never learned whether he had succeeded. Now she set out to see him again. He ushered her into an office decorated with his degrees from Europe, Canada and the United States. The place was softly lamplit and smelled faintly of cigar smoke. There were several pictures on the desk; one of them was of her.

It took him no time to diagnose her. He put a stethoscope to her abdomen and heard a heartbeat. When he moved the instrument from his ears to his neck, he smiled.

"Boom-boom-boom, very healthy little socialist child," he said.

"You can't tell anyone," my mother said.

"What's to tell? I'm your doctor, you're my patient."

"Aunt Lee, my parents, Harriet, anyone!" There might even have been the edge of blackmail in her voice.

"You will have to have the child, you know that," Docky said.

"Just … don't … say …*anything.*"

* * *

Pinochle night. Everyone was there. The game took place in the foyer, on the linen-covered table, under a cloud of smoke that drifted up and formed a hazy ceiling above the men. The older women congregated in the living room over marzipan, strudel and coffee, the younger ones were in the back bedrooms.

My mother avoided eye contact with her parents and with her sister Harriet. There were two relatives she had planned to tell. One was Harold, a younger first cousin who had been a sidekick, confidant, and audience for years. Now the two of them sat at a white enamel kitchen table. My mother had closed the swinging door to the dinette area, which was usually kept open. She sipped at a glass of scotch and smoked a cigarette down. The story never got to her mouth. The door to the kitchen suddenly burst open and a phalanx of women marched into the room —her mother, Harriet, Aunt Lee.

Harold was asked to leave. The women closed the door behind him and came forward in a wall, positioning themselves at the kitchen table so my mother could not have gotten to her feet if she'd tried.

"Eleanor, Docky told us everything," Lee announced from a vast height, a perennial pince-nez in place, arms folded across an expansive bosom.

"Told …?"

"Eleanor, what in the world is wrong with you?"

"*Told?*"

A cataract of assault and accusation fell on her: "Ruin your life like this!" "Papa, poor papa!" "Deny …" "Ruin …" "Awful …" "Irresponsible …" "for the rest of your life." My mother pushed herself to her feet, bumping into the women and knocking them back a clumsy step or two. But the game was up and she knew it. When her mother put a hand on her shoulder and pushed her back down into the chair, she offered no physical resistance. The room eventually quieted down, and when it did a conspiracy was born.

"Let me understand," her father said. "Better for me to think you had tuberculosis than that you were pregnant?"

The goal of the conspiracy was simple: to keep the news at all costs from her father, a sixty-one-year-old druggist who was considered so fragile he might be destroyed if he found out. Lee was the lead conspirator. As the director of a social service agency in Newark, she had a certain professional authority that matched her personality. She knew the places, the little out-of-the-way homes for wayward Jewish girls, places in Hoboken and as far away as Kokomo, Indiana, where a disgraced child could wait out her time, be delivered by a professional staff, and then be disencumbered of her burden, the bastard child, who would swiftly and anonymously be placed with the appropriate agencies. She also had figured out a way to keep my grandfather in the dark.

My mother was to be diagnosed with tuberculosis. Docky, a TB specialist after all, would make the diagnosis and the arrangements for her removal to a sanitarium far from the city, too far for anyone in the family to visit. Meanwhile, a reservation would be made for my mother in one of these lying-in places; she would wait out her time in safety and then return home after she gave birth. All of this was laid out with a sense of irrefutable logic. How else to arrange for a very compromised young woman to put the past behind her and get on with her life?

My mother wanted no part of homes in Hoboken or Kokomo. She did not want to surrender her child. She wanted her father kept out of it, that was all. So she went along—and did not—at the same time. She had no trouble with the tuberculosis part but told the others she would make her own living arrangements. She would figure out the giving-birth part later on.

So one night, my grandmother explained to her husband that their daughter had not been well lately, that she had taken her to see Docky, who had examined her and given her a chest X-ray, and that the results were not good. My mother watched her father's face actually seem to lose its definition as he took in the news. He was heartbroken. She tried to shut her ears when the questions came. Finally, she left the table, saying she did not feel well, closed herself in her bedroom, and sobbed into her pillows.

After dinner, by prearrangement, Docky and Lee arrived at the house. He had a large manila envelope under his arm, from which he removed an enormous X-ray of an obvious pair of lungs. He waved the sheet of film around as he described it in technical terms—which he then translated—the etiology of the lesion, the location of the tubercles, how bad it all was ... and how he had already taken it upon himself to make arrangements for Eleanor to go to a sanitarium in Saranac, New York, the best facility in the East, he said, where she would be cured, completely cured within six months.

My mother gave birth to me using an assumed name at St. Elizabeth's Hospital—in Washington Heights, in Northern Manhattan. Sometime after that I was placed in a foster home. Though at the outset my mother's family, particularly Lee and Harriet, were clearly determined to have me adopted, it soon became apparent that my mother was not willing to go along. What at first was confusion in her mind soon became a determination to hold on to her child, regardless of what anyone said or did.

By the end, there was one more major conspirator, an aunt, Rose, who took in foster children to make money and was brought in to help convince my grandfather to do the same. So my grandfather went along. One day, I—the unidentified foster child—was brought home, I was blond, very blond, and had eyes that looked like blueberries, set in a very solemn face. My grandfather was supposed to have laughed the first time he saw me.

"What's his name?" he asked.

"David," he was told.

My mother had been home for over a year now, recovered from her tuberculosis. But she continued to look pale and puffy, and her spirits constantly seemed to be dragging. However, she was the first in the family to exhibit affection for "the child." She very quickly took to "him" and became my principal caretaker, this fact was observed with pleasure by others, especially her father, who was encouraged by anything that seemed to rouse his daughter from her unsettling lethargy. Some time later, after everyone was used to having a foster child in the house, and long after friends and neighbors had become accustomed to seeing me around, my grandfather was told the truth.

His wife told him one night after dinner, carefully explaining to him why he had been kept out of the loop for so long. He listened in astonishment as the details of the hoodwinking were presented to him, slowly and methodically, like the opening of a nest of Chinese boxes, one opening to the next.

I can imagine my grandfather at the table at that moment. I can picture the long silence that followed the story, and how he might have lowered his head slightly, gazed forward, chin inclined downward a bit into his chest. When he got angry, his look became dreamy rather than roiled. This dreamy look of his, however, never failed to frighten his family.

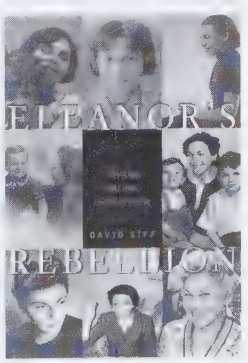
"For God's sake, Mutya, don't just sit there!" his wife said into the silence at the table.

"Let me understand," he volunteered finally, his low voice in a sleepy buzz. "You lied to me, is that right?" "Docky lied to me, Lee lied to me, is that right? The medical reports, the X-rays, all lies, is that right?"

"We did this for you, Papa! No one wanted you to be hurt," my mother said.

"For me?" he said. He got up from the table. "You thought it would be better for me to think you had tuberculosis rather than that you were pregnant?"

My mother told me that her father did not blame her but his wife for the betrayal, and that he did not forgive her for the rest of his life. ■



Excerpted from ELEANOR'S REBELLION *by David Siff. Copyright (c) by David Siff. Reprinted with permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.*

"Get Rid of the Baby. Let's Go Home."

by Campbell Armstrong

"GIRL, DOLL AND FLOWERED SHAWL" BY JOYCE STOLAROFF

In I Hope You Have a Good Life, *Irish novelist Campbell Armstrong tells the story of his ex-wife, a English Jewish woman named Eileen Altman, and the child of her teenage years whom she was forced to give up for adoption. Campbell and Eileen met in 1961 as they worked for paltry wages in a London shopping mall. He was an aspiring novelist, she the 19-year-old flamboyant, hard-partying daughter of an Orthodox Jewish family. The night of their first sexual encounter, he noticed a scar on her abdomen—the relic of a caesarean section—and she told him the story of her missing girl.*

A note on the players: Doris is Eileen's mother, Israel (or "Issy"), her father. Sydney is her brother, who keeps her secret for years. And the author is her adoring ex, who despite their divorce and his remarriage stays close to Eileen throughout her life.

In 1954 when she was sixteen, [Eileen] met a man eleven years older than she was. When Eileen became pregnant, she knew very little about her body—she was only sixteen and apparently sex education wasn't the kind of topic Doris discussed around the house. She once told Eileen, in a piece of misinformation that might have made an old nun proud, that babies grew in the backyard. And then, in this household of biological myths and social respectability and basic decency, Eileen had the searing, unenviable task of announcing she was pregnant.

She didn't have the courage to face her parents when it came right down to it, so she asked her favorite aunt and confidante, Aunt D, to tell Doris and Issy for her. Eileen waited upstairs in her bedroom while Aunt D broke the news. Eileen heard her mother crying loudly, hysterically. She went downstairs. It must have been the longest walk she had ever taken. Doris confronted her. Words like

disgrace and scandal and shame crackled in the room like electrical disturbances. Her father, quiet and pale, was trying to comfort his wife.

Since abortion was illegal, it wasn't even a consideration. It was an activity associated with backstreet butchers. But this was 1954 and the idea of a single mother carried the heavy burden of social stigma. The fallen woman, the bastard child. In Issy and Doris' world, the only feasible solution to Eileen's predicament was evasion. This was the scheme they hatched: Israel would give up his furrier's business in Glasgow and they'd go to Scarborough, a coastal resort in Yorkshire where they'd often vacationed. Among family and friends they'd circulate the story that Doris was suffering from a bad case of nerves, and needed "rest" in a place removed from stress. She was willing to accept the indignity of the label "nervous breakdown" rather than admit to anyone that her daughter was pregnant. Only one condition was imposed: in return for the support and care of her parents, Eileen would give the baby up for adoption. Apart from Aunt D, the only other person privy to the conspiracy was Eileen's brother Sydney, ten years older than she, who'd go to any lengths to protect the family name.

And he did, he kept the silence for years, until it was nothing more than a foggy memory.

* * *

They created quite an impressive make-believe world in Scarborough, and in this fairy-tale place, this time out of time, anything could be suspended or ignored—even Doris' kosher discipline. When Eileen developed a craving for bacon sandwiches, Doris gave her the money to buy them. What did it matter? The real world was on hold. Issy became a milkman.

Eileen began to think more and more of the child growing inside her. She was developing the proprietorial affection of a mother for her unborn baby. One day she asked Doris the unthinkable: might she keep the child? Doris told her to put that notion out of her head immediately.

On May 30, 1955, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl she named Barbara, after her favorite childhood doll. The idea of a girl having a baby she named after a childhood doll touched me when she told me: I thought of her in 1955 suspended in that spooky place between adolescence and adulthood, neither one thing nor the other, a child-woman.

She remained in the hospital for three weeks to recover from surgery, and during this time she bottle-fed Barbara because she'd been given medication to dry her breast milk. Daily contact with a baby you have no chance of taking home and raising. You hold the child, kiss it, adore it, take it into your heart. Only you don't get to take it home.

After three weeks, she went to the adoption society at the appointed time, where she was left alone with the baby for a short period. She held the child in her arms. She cried, pressing her damp face against the baby's. She wished there was another door through which she might escape, taking Barbara with her, disappearing into a place where they'd never be found.

No. One look at the expression on Doris' face killed any such chance. It's done with. Get rid of the baby. Let's go home. I'm sorry it has to be this way. In the most heartbreaking moment she had ever known, Eileen whispered to the baby, "I love you. I hope you have a good life."

And Barbara was taken away by strangers.

* * *

[More than four decades pass. Eileen is diagnosed with lung cancer and is living in Phoenix, Arizona. Her daughter Barbara, in England, is also diagnosed with cancer that has spread to her lungs. In June 1997, Barbara wrote in her journal, "I am looking into the face of death. I must find my mother immediately."]

On the night of August 2, 1997, a Saturday—12 days after I have come back from America, days of constant health bulletins and messages of hope and emanations of dread from Phoenix—the telephone rings in Sydney's flat.

A woman's voice: "Mr. Altman? Mr. Sydney Altman?"

Sydney says it is.

"I'm trying to trace your sister. Eileen Altman."

Sydney asks, "Who am I speaking to?"

The woman has a Yorkshire accent. She hesitates a moment, then she replies, "I'm Barbara."

"Barbara?" Sydney can't place the name. Who does he know called Barbara? And then he remembers, and he thinks, no, surely not, this has to be some other Barbara. This can't be the child from all those years ago.

But it is. The woman says quietly, "I'm Eileen's daughter. I want to contact her. It's important. It's very important. I've been looking and looking for a long time. I need your help, if you're willing, and I need it quickly ..."

Sydney doesn't know what to say. His thoughts rush at once to the fact that Eileen is fighting for her life: what would a shock so seismic as the reappearance of a daughter she gave away for adoption more than forty years ago do to her position, already precarious? He decides to put Barbara off, stall her. "This is a bad time. I don't know how she could handle the news that you're trying to find her. She's very ill. She's been diagnosed with cancer."

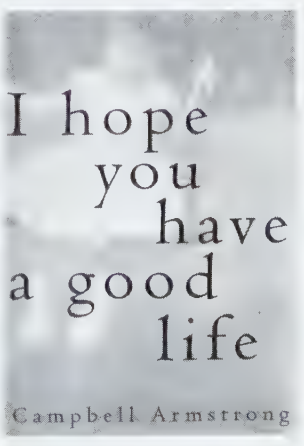
"Cancer?"

"She just had an operation, and she's in a really weak condition, and your call comes completely out of the blue. I need time to think about the best way to approach all this—"

"I understand that ... the trouble is, I don't know how much time I've got, Mr. Altman."

"All I'm saying is we wait until Eileen gets stronger, then we'll see."

Barbara is silent for second before she says, "I haven't explained myself properly. I've got cancer too." ■



Excerpted from I HOPE YOU HAVE A GOOD LIFE *by Campbell Armstrong. Copyright (c) 2000 by Campbell Armstrong. Reprinted by permission of Crown Publishers, a division of Random House, Inc.*

Warsaw Diary:
Democracy in the Balance
Jewish Feminists Rally For Tolerance in a Post-Communist World

by Shana Penn

Feminists seek "to kill the unborn, promote sexual promiscuity and the elimination of marriage."
—Cardinal Jozef Glemp, head of the Polish Catholic Church

Poles today think "a woman is simply inferior, and her inferiority must be constantly confirmed."—Bozena Uminska, gender studies lecturer at Warsaw University

During an official Corpus Christi commemoration on June 22 of this year, Cardinal Jozef Glemp, at the helm of the powerful Polish Catholic Church, warned the nation about the world's evils, especially feminists, "propagators of a new social disorder, [who seek] to kill the unborn, ... promote sexual promiscuity and the elimination of marriage, humiliate women." The Cardinal compared feminists to Nazis, allegations that carry ominous weight in Poland, where the Nazi occupation resulted in six million Polish deaths and the country's devastation. A backlash against feminism has gained momentum here in recent months, largely because feminist ideas are circulating in the mainstream media. And yes, vigilant feminists flooded the Cardinal's headquarters and press with protest letters and editorials.

It is perhaps an ironic sign of success that the women's movement is under attack on the pulpit, in the press and even in parliament. Conservative politicians wield the weapon of religion to defend the nation against gender equality: "The woman plays a special role in our Catholic nation," says one parliamentarian. "The state ought to organize social life so as to minimize the damage done to the family by the fact that women work," says another. These messages have already been translated into policies. Women have lost many of the rights and benefits they knew under communism: abortion, full employment, educational opportunities, state-subsidized childcare, healthcare and other services.

Since the 1989 collapse of communism, the country's road to democracy resembles a wrestling match between its traditions (Catholicism, nationalism, romanticism, family values, xenophobia), its contradictory communist legacy (authoritarianism, purges, cultural isolation), and its newly adopted democratic values (pluralism, freedom of expression, gender equality, justice). Feminists, who challenge everything from gender discriminatory policies to church-state alliances, are both the catalyst and the target of national controversies.

The good news is that no stone stays unturned under the critical eye of Poland's second wave feminists, who have become the relentless watchdogs of Polish democracy. And for those who are Jewish, the upturned stones include Judaism in a post-Holocaust society. Jewish feminists are taking to task the fledgling Jewish establishment, highlighting sexism and protesting the mainstream culture's anti-Semitism.

After more than 60 years of persecution, first by the Nazis and then the Communist Party, Polish Jews, estimated at 20,000, are "coming out of the Jewish closet," an oft-heard phrase describing the phenomenal reclaiming of hidden Jewish identity. The "new Jews"—another popular phrase—have organized a visible community life, centered in Warsaw, with an Orthodox synagogue, schools, summer camps, adult education, a community center, and a crisis hotline for adults who've recently discovered their Jewish roots.

Vociferous female critics number only a handful, but their bold queries have already elicited strong responses in the press. They charge that an Orthodox monopoly, with substantial Western backing from the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and other institutions, is creating an unwelcoming, patriarchal environment. They ask, Now that Poland is a democracy, shouldn't the Jewish community reflect its own diversity? And how should the community contend with Poland's prevalent anti-Semitism?

These questions may well be a litmus test of the Jewish community's diversity. They are also testimony to how far Poland has come. Most remember too well the Communist Party's university expulsions, employ-

ment bans and show trials, the censorship and anti-Semitic campaigns that, between 1968-70, drove thousands out of the country and reduced the Jewish population from 40,000 to 5,000. Although these feminists dare to speak, their position remains precarious in a still-hostile climate.

Facing Down Bias

Bozena Uminska, a gender studies lecturer at Warsaw University, views herself as a poet-philosopher, not a provocateur. But she provoked the nation when she published a study of anti-Semitic and misogynist language in the works of well-known Polish writers. "Anti-Semitism has always been and still is very common in Poland," she wrote in the Summer 1999 issue of the literary journal *Res Publica Nowa*. "It is so deeply rooted in the language, and so unchallenged, that it is dark under every street lamp. ... Due to weak standards, we approach the various anti-Semitic attitudes with mercy and understanding: 'They were young and didn't mean what they wrote'—or—'They died young, and you don't talk badly about the dead.'"

Uminska's critique of several writers in that article blew the lid off what right-wing Poles consider socially acceptable literary discourse: singular, exclusionary praise for Mother Poland. The 52-year-old literary critic, witty, warm and confident, told me in an interview: "Such language, whether in literature or spoken, is so obvious, so normal, so acceptable. For example, 'By the way, that bitch...' or 'By the way, the Jews again...'"

We sat in her candle-lit kitchen for the interview following a Friday night dinner. Once before, I had visited the flat, located in the wartime Jewish ghetto, for a costume party in mock celebration of the First of May. "Dress as your favorite Bolshevik" instructed the invitation to a dozen feminists and their partners. Surrounded by homemade banners of red stars and hammers-and-sickles, we had room to move vertically only, popping up to declare manifestoes and sing the Internationale amidst peals of laughter.

Among Polish feminists, someone is always hosting a soiree; everyone brings something—wine, flowers, cheesecake, berries. Feminist conversation spreads beyond private homes into classrooms, cafes, restaurants, the rare and precious hot chocolate parlor, and most dramatically, into the media and onto the streets. On International Women's Day last year, close to 100 women sported red or purple wigs and marched through Warsaw, carrying signs that protested "Democracy without women is not democracy!," garnering widespread media coverage.

Uminska also became a media sensation when, in her article, she compared anti-Semitism with sexism. "There are similarities, but in very different ways," she told me. "Jews are dangerous. Women are insignificant. The problem is that in intellectual circles in Poland today, you should not be openly anti-Semitic, but you can be openly misogynist."

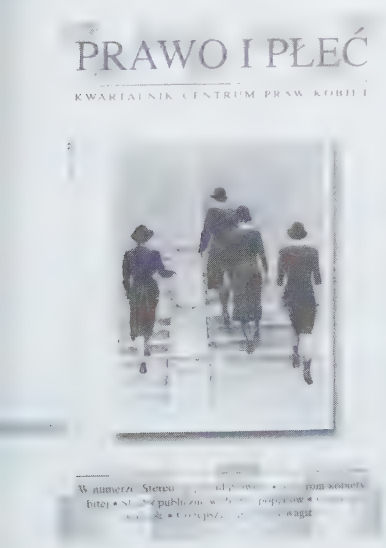
Uminska zoomed her lens in on the early 20th-century writer Stefan Jeromski, a member of the Polish literary canon. In his acclaimed novel *The Calm Before Spring*, the hero encounters both the Warsaw Jewish ghetto and a peasant village on the country's southern border. Uminska argued that the hero displayed a cold cynicism toward the Jews he observed. She quotes him describing the ghetto: "There was an abundance of paupers in rags, who utilized the mobility indigenous to the Jewish race for cheating each other and fighting over food rations...The entire crowd gave the impression of a council of the condemned possessed by the devil."

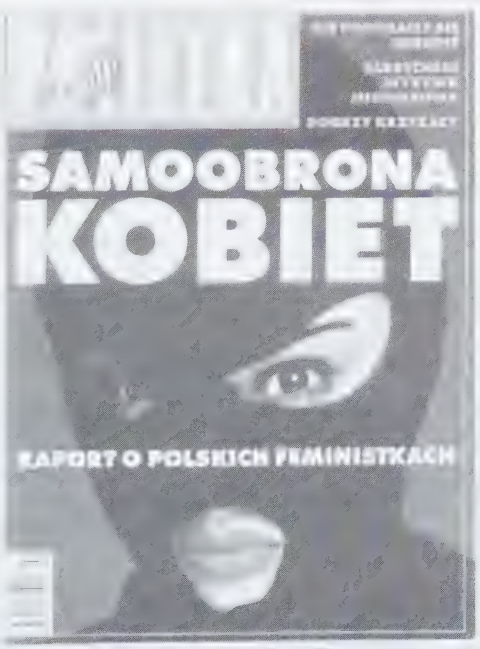
Uminska concluded that to the hero, "the impoverished Jews alone were responsible for their misery." In sharp contrast, she wrote, the hero gushed for the poverty-stricken peasants, who were innocent, dignified victims.

With a mischievous glint in her eyes, Uminska told me: "I made an intellectually responsible examination, sprinkled with a few clearly marked provocations." She wrote: "Jeromski was never a right-wing nationalist. We do not consider him an anti-Semite either. Is it because the bottom line of what we label anti-Semitism is symbolized by the gas chamber and Xyklon B? Would Jeromski throw Xyklon B into the gas chamber?

"But before the gas is thrown, a long process takes place during which the numerous possibilities for throwing are created: worldview, morality, mentality, politics, and technical developments." To Uminska, the novelist helped clear the ground for the Nazi-erected gas chambers in Poland.

Turning from anti-Semitic language, Uminska sharpened her





The status of women is front-page news in two Polish magazines.

knives for a feminist reproach: "In the case of women, we can observe a similar phenomenon, but the standards are even lower. If a Jew is threatening although somewhat attractive, ... a woman is simply inferior [and] her inferiority must be constantly confirmed. The way to reach this goal is to humiliate the 'enemy' or make fun of her."

She tuned her ears to sexist language in the writings of Kryzstof Metrak, a celebrated film and literary critic of the '70s-'80s, quoting one of his exemplary "by the way" remarks: "If you start talking with a woman about art, it is not possible to switch to the ass." Uminska explained: "If you talk with a woman about art, you treat her as a human being. If you treat her as a human being, you cannot treat her at the same time as a woman, meaning 'ass.' What you need for sex is the awareness of female inferiority....Otherwise, the masculine world would experience unusual disturbances."

An unapologetic display of intellectual autonomy such as Uminska's essay would have been unthinkable during Poland's communist era. Both the journal and the writer would have been locked up in prison, because, first, anti-Semitism did not exist—after all, there were no Jews, only atheists—and second, women had already been liberated. The "Jewish Question" and the "Woman Question" were thus both considered resolved.

In 1999, Uminska did not have to fear the government's retribution. Instead, she confronted a brutal media backlash from anti-intellectual right-wingers, who hurled a litany of allegations: Informer! Communist! Collaborator! Traitor! Purveyor of 'political correctness'!

"Uminska's text is similar to the informer's report—relating to her [communist] superiors anything that seems even remotely suspicious," charged Agata Bielik-Robson in the December issue of *Res Publica Nowa,* which published the original article. "Her mind is going mad, lacks logic."

Bielik-Robson's allegations were taken up in two popular dailies, the centrist *Rzczepospolita* and the right-wing *Zycie*, where Polish emigre Agnieszka Kolakowska, writing from Paris, and others accused Uminska of spewing out that Western poison, "political correctness—a disease that attacks the brain and causes lack of common sense, the ability to think rationally, and saddest of all, sense of humor. In Bozena Uminska, it shows in the form of feminism," wrote Kolakowska, the daughter of Poland's revered philosopher, Leszek Kolakowski. "If political correctness spreads in Poland...communism will be back."

Uminska's critics demanded the abolishment of Warsaw University's Gender Studies Department, where Uminska was accused of infecting the minds of innocent students. "Ideological indoctrination is being cultivated under the rubric of academia," warned Kolakowska. "There is no other word, this is treason."

The conflict, though it subsided, gravely disturbed many liberal intellectuals: Right-wingers were suddenly aiming political fire at the universities and the still-fledgling gender studies programs. They were exploiting the dread of communism and Western imperialism to undermine democracy. Feminism was an easy target, a new idea that could be framed as communist or Western, dangerously "unPolish" and not to be trusted.

Challenging Orthodoxy

A very different kind of public debate—also led by feminists, also concerned with pluralism—erupted around the same time. In this instance, feminists challenged the Jewish establishment in the mainstream press. Szoszana Ronen is an Israeli emigre who has taught philosophy at Warsaw University for nearly ten years. I first met her at Uminska's First of May party. Last September, just before Rosh Hashanah, she took on Poland's Jewish Orthodoxy in a leading national daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*: "I am surprised that Jews in Poland have chosen Orthodox Judaism....Orthodox Judaism is the worst choice of all, because it is intolerant of Reform Jews and discriminates against women."

How absurd to embrace Orthodoxy, Ronen exclaimed. In Poland, most Jews have hidden, suspected or stolen identities that don't meet Orthodox standards for "Jewishness"; and almost every Jew, quarter, half or whole, lacks the knowledge to recreate Judaic traditions. Ronen warned: Orthodox Judaism will never embrace you.

The professor issued a call-to-arms: "I want to suggest something to Polish Jews, although I know they won't accept it: secular Jewishness." Why get "hooked on yarmulkes and beards"? Choose Judaism's universal values instead, she encouraged her readers.

Konstantin Gebert, an Orthodox Jew and then editor-in-chief of *Midrasz* (*Tikkun*'s Polish cousin), published a fierce rebuttal in the same newspaper, displaying some of the same xenophobia of right-wing Poles. "Ronen's statements [are] understandable only in the context of the long-lasting conflicts and hatred between liberal and Orthodox Jews in Israel. Ronen is...starting her war here."

"Polish 'new Jews' are emulating our 'new democrats' by institutionalizing patriarchy and subordinating women." — Kazimiera Szczuka, gender studies lecturer at Warsaw University

"Political correctness—a disease that attacks the brain a causes lack of common sense, the ability to think rationally, and saddest of all sense of humor. It shows in the form of feminism." —Agnieszka Kolakowska

CREDIT: LEFT, SHANA PENN RIGHT, DOMINIKA SUWIK

challenging the status quo: feminists Kazimiera Szczuka, left, and Bozena Uminska, have waged a war of words in the Polish press against bias and bigotry.

Gebert, whose courageous commitment to rebuilding Polish Jewish life almost cost him his freedom under communism, underscored: "Only religious identity has its future among Polish Jews....Who gave *her* the right to write about Polish Jews?"

Ronen and Gebert had aired their views not in the marginal Jewish press but rather in the Polish equivalent of *The New York Times*. In a third editorial, Kazimiera Szczuka, another gender studies lecturer at Warsaw University, reflected on the visibility of this tussle: "The debate...in *Gazeta Wyborcza* is a big gain for our new democracy. It's not the Jews' internal problem only; it matters for the whole society, its roots and horizons. The occurrence of the open discussion...shows that a lot has already changed."

Szczuka, a Polish-born Jew with an honored family Holocaust history, defended the Israeli "outsider" and locked horns with Gebert, Polish Jew to Polish Jew. "Jewish heritage is much more than religion," she wrote. "This is evident in the contributions of secular Jews to Polish culture and throughout the world....Polish 'new Jews' are emulating our 'new democrats' by institutionalizing patriarchy and subordinating women."

Few people wished to be excluded from the fiery tête-a-tête. In late October, weeks after Simchat Torah celebrations, the Warsaw Jewish community center called a meeting to debate the issues. Ronen, Gebert and Szczuka were the featured panelists, and they packed the auditorium beyond standing-room capacity. Their presentations were quickly overrun by a boisterous speak-out, unseen since the prewar years. Young and old clamored to put in their two cents and tell their personal stories.

The the sheer reality of passionate Jewish convictions was exhilarating to hear, Szczuka told me. Some participants attributed Orthodox Judaism's popularity to the support it receives from the Lauder Foundation. Others accused the Orthodox of excluding them, and several protested that the synagogue's structure humiliates women. Handfuls of senior citizens, atheists since communist times, "applauded Ronen's arguments and Szczuka's feminist manifesto," reported Gebert's magazine, *Midrasz*, in a begrudgingly journalistic tone. The magazine concluded "the turnout and liveliness proved it was necessary." Polish Jewry, silent no more.

A Small Start

When the High Holiday season rolled around this year, news spread quickly via the Internet: Post-communist Poland's first Reform services were being planned by a new congregation, Beit Warszawa. In quickfire response, spokespersons for Warsaw's Orthodox establishment voiced its displeasure, while many Jews were delighted at the alternative.

An American woman rabbi was flown in to lead the services in Warsaw's touristy Old Town. Rabbi Cindy Culpepper endeavored to guide and uplift non-English/non-Hebrew speaking Jewish doubters and hopefuls, using a prayer book written in English and Hebrew only. She welcomed her congregants by waving her hand in an overly eager hello, and then timidly explained the meaning of the Jewish new year. She was too pedagogic and self-conscious; she needed music, not logic. Through Polish eyes, she appeared insecure—in other words, she behaved like an American.

Fifty people attended the service. Only nine returned the next morning. At best, it was a noble first attempt and a sobering learning experience. It will probably take generations to seed diverse religious practices; it will also take support from the West. The disenfranchised do not know where to begin to explore spiritual and cultural expressions that might hold meaning for them.

During the Rosh Hashanah service, I felt the chasm that separates me from my Polish friends. I can read Hebrew, pray, find sustenance. My friends don't, never have, how can they? I sensed their spiritual yearning, which they seem to quietly doubt may ever be fulfilled. They are well-educated and too wise to give themselves over to anything that doesn't demand their intelligence, emotions and full attention. One idea crystallized over dinner: we will prepare a freedom seder for the coming Pesach. Next year in Warsaw.

Shana Penn, an Open Society Institute Fellow and visiting scholar at Mills College Women's Leadership Institute, is writing a book on women, revolution and democracy in Poland.

"GOD HAS MANY MESSENGERS" -RASHI

A Wise-For-Her-Years Thirteen-Year-Old Looks Back on Life

SID SCHNUR

The author with her brother, Lincoln.

Many ***BAT MITZVAHS*** *have "themes," some painfully at odds with the formal values of Jewish culture. We at LILITH actually know of one bat mitzvah in Maryland that had a "mall" theme, and of another (in L.A.) that hosted a stripper! Other bat mitzvahs—though not morally clueless—can be strikingly out of touch with the authentic struggles and pressing questions of a teenage girl herself.*

On the following pages, we present, by way of contrast, a 13-year-old who finds a "theme" that truly speaks to the current journey of her open and roiling life, and that earns her, in the end, deserved entry into the ranks of Jewish womanhood. Barnstorming adulthood in a meaningful way is, after all, the whole point *of adolescent initiations.*

What follows is ***Anna Schnur-Fishman****'s bat mitzvah speech, describing her "theme" in all its unfolding parts. Her service—and party—took place at Greenwood House, a Jewish nursing home in Trenton, New Jersey.*

As a second-born child, I have always believed that 95% of the world consists of Lincoln, my older brother, and the other 5% gets shared by me and the other 4 billion people on this planet. So when it came time to plan my bat mitzvah I could only think in terms of what Lincoln had done at *his* bar mitzvah. And what I kept choking on—over and over—was that he had had four grandparents at his bar mitzvah, whereas I would only have one. Last spring, we lost three grandparents within five weeks. I wanted so much to have Bubbie and PopPop and Saba at my bat mitzvah in the same way that my brother had, but there was nothing I could do about it.

At the same time, I was also looking for a *theme* for my bat

mitzvah—something that hinted at the young woman I was becoming, and that helped me see who I was. Lincoln loves Yiddishkeit and jazz, so his bar mitzvah was at a klezmer camp. But *my* theme just wasn't coming into focus. Finally my mother helped me out.

"I hate to say this, Annie" she said, "But I think you've been *handed* a theme. It's called loss. It's not what you've chosen; it's what's chosen you, which in itself is a pretty grown-up thing to get your mind around." Mom said that in the face of difficult things in life, God sends us many messengers (*"Harbay sheeluchin yesh la-Makom"*), and that it is *our* task to find these messengers; they don't just come knocking on your door. And that these messengers make *sense* out of painful things. All of a sudden, in a flash, I realized I wanted to have my bat mitzvah at Greenwood House. In this way, in some fashion, I thought my grandparents could come to my bat mitzvah.

And so this past year I committed myself to coming to Greenwood House every *Shabbos*, and although I love my school, my friends and my family—and more recently I also love clothes and makeup and manicures—somehow spending time here with Dora, Tilly, Estelle and others became the core of my week, the emotional center, the part of *Shabbos* that always felt like *Shabbos*. When I leave Greenwood House each week after *davvening*, I always feel happy. I also thought that committing to coming here weekly for a year, rain or shine, would be a grown-up thing to do (sometimes I had to make a half dozen calls to get a ride!). And I also wanted to see if I could actually *feel* myself growing up and becoming a bat mitzvah, if I could actually *feel* change. I think I did see myself grow in some ways, and that that experience in itself makes you a bat mitzvah.

When I went off to camp for a month this summer, the last thing I did before I left was come to Greenwood House to say goodbye to my friends. And when I returned from camp, the first thing I did was stop by to say hello and see if everybody was still okay. Honey Frank was still here, but after her sister and then her roommate Josephine died, she somehow didn't recognize me anymore. The resident who would cry out unless I held her hand had died; Mrs. Spiegel—you're still your peppery self; Archie—you had taken to wearing crazy sunglasses that made you look fabulous; Norman—you had lost sight in one eye but you were still, as always, amiable. And the woman who sits like a sentry in the hallway crocheting granny squares that her daughter-in-law then sews into afghans was still sitting there crocheting. More or less, I divined, after my summer camp absence, everything was still all right in the world.

The first thing I learned at Greenwood House is how rooted I feel being with old people. There are men here whose Galitzianer accents sound exactly like my PopPop's, and women who *kvell* on and on just like all the other *bubbies* I've ever met. It gives me a sense of continuity, of a community through time. I loved it when my Saba used to talk about the old Jewish *shtetl* in Trenton, and when PopPop told stories about Korostyshev. I love asking the residents about their lives: "But when the Cossacks came, Mr. Garfing, where did you hide?" I asked Honey why she never married. And I asked Harry how he remembered lullabies from Odessa. One of the residents here always called me Sylvia, so I learned to say, "I'm Sylvia? Fill me in! My memory isn't too good these days." Old people give young people such a feeling of well-being. I think society should put us together a lot more.

Bob Goldstein, a resident here who often sits outside on the bench, took my hand one day and told me his whole life story. "I had two daughters and a happy marriage," he began, "and a business in the Bronx." After a long *meiseh*, he was finished, and as he let go my hand, he said simply: "I just want you should know I was a *person*. I came from somewhere." All year, I haven't been able to stop thinking about that. I love writing, and when I hear residents' stories, they feel like books that will never be published, and as I talk to them, I can hear each chapter in the book, each page turning. Sometimes when I leave Greenwood House, I fantasize about what I would do if I were the president of a nursing home. I would definitely write biographies of each resident (with photos) and hang them in the halls, starting with Mr. Goldstein. And I would let residents bring in their own furniture and have bigger closets. And I would put a Starbucks

RON SCHNUR

The Jewish "Girl" with her friends [from top left] Kornelia Hercsky, Tobe Kraut, Ann Litowitz, Ida Spiegel and Sally Hand: July 2000.

In the face of difficult things, God sends us messengers. But they don't just knock on our door . . . we have to find them.

where the atrium is, so there would be people dropping in all the time and it would be more *lebedickeh*—busy and lively. And I would definitely attach a school to this building.

There is a resident here who cries out a lot, but whenever I give her my hand she stops crying. And when I take it away, she starts crying again. And when I give my hand back, she stops and is comforted. It's excruciating to walk away from her. If my school were connected to this building, kids could do their social studies homework while sitting here—writing with your right hand—and with your left hand you could be comforting somebody's *bubbie*. **I guess the second thing I've learned here is that there are so many underutilized resources in the modern world.** My left hand is completely underutilized. And so are old people, and so are children. I don't think it was like this in the old *shtetlach.*

RON SCHNUR

The Jewish "Woman": September 2000

The third thing I realized here is how much fun it can be to visit. Not to make light of some residents' confusion, but Harry always used to think I was his wife, which I enjoyed being very much. And Florence thought that the song, "How Much Is that Doggy in the Window?," was a *Shabbos zmira,* and so I'd sing it with her on *Shabbos.* When I told a resident not long ago that I was having my bat mitzvah here, she got very excited. "*Mazal tov!*" she told me, "You're having your blood pressure taken here? Don't worry, darling, the doctor will take care of the whole thing!" My mother and I loved that exchange. It was so sweet of the resident to express her heartfelt concern, and so easy for us to be an appreciative audience. I find these conversations funny and comforting. There is such warmth in them—a kind of warmth that I experience only here.

I have received so much more then I gave at Greenwood House, and, ultimately, having my bat mitzvah here is a way to say *thank you*—which I didn't realize it *would* be back when I started coming here a year ago. I will always remember this year in my life as a year apart. Not only because I became a bat mitzvah, but because my Bubbie and PopPop and Saba died, and then my Aunt Gladys died, and my Great-Uncle Abe Lavinson, and then my young Aunt Ruth. It was a very difficult year—there is no way around that.

But God sent me so many messengers—Norman and Ida and Archie and Kate and Dr. Babad and Sally. Volunteers like Mr. Roberts and Len Epstein—they were *shleechim* (messengers) too. This year that I'll be living with my grandmother at her house is a *shaliach,* and so was all the time I got to spend with my cousins, getting to know them better—even though it was at intensive care units and in *shiva* houses. I gained as much family as I lost. I learned that part of the point of sitting at *shiva* houses is to strengthen our connections to the living. I am thankful that my visits to Greenwood House framed my bat mitzvah year, that I learned what "*Harbay sheeluchin yesh la-Makom*" really means, and that it became such a bridge in my life.

When I got my new bat mitzvah dress a few weeks ago and put on my high heels, and put my hair up and my contacts in, and put on stockings and lip gloss, my mother said, "My gosh! You suddenly look like Bubbie!" She called for my father, and he told me, "Bubbie had wonderful taste. She would love you in this dress." And when I got my first manicure on my own yesterday, I thought of my Aunt Gladys, who without question would have taken her god-daughter for a manicure on the day before she became a woman! And I'm sure my Uncle Abe is here, wondering when we get to eat already. And I'm sure my grandfathers *kvelled* hearing me *layn* Torah. And that my Aunt Ruth, a wonderful cook, is out there swapping recipes with Betty the Caterer.

At Greenwood House, I learned that even in the midst of sad things, our lives continue. That endings and beginnings, joys and sorrow, all happen at the same time, and life really does go on. Nina Frank, a wonderful resident here, an intellectual and a philosopher, who died not long ago and who I miss a lot, always would take me aside to gently teach me something important. She loved teaching children. She said to me once, "Anna, God gives us memories so that we can all smell roses in December." And I think that's really true. If we stop to *think* about roses, we really *can* smell them in December. And if I remember what Nina told me, then I can put her in this bat mitzvah speech, and then she's here at my bat mitzvah.

Harbay sheeluchin yesh la-Makom. God has many messengers. God sends us huge tangles of messengers; we are each other's messengers; and there are more messengers in this room then any of us will ever really figure out.

"The Lord is our keeper. The Lord holds all our right hands. She holds us in our sorrows and pushes us towards joys. From this day forward, and forevermore." Amen. ■

Jewish Chicken Soup

by Emma Rosenthal

It is not any soup
it is a deep and dark mystical connection
boiling pots while ancient hands read tarot and Kabalah
it is an old stewing hen
boiled for hours until the salted sinewy gamy meat falls off the bones
it is fresh herbs sage thyme bay laurel dill rosemary picked from the garden
and boiled in the broth with parsley carrots rutabagas
turnips parsnips onions
and celery
and the garlic
carried round my neck for weeks before crushed into the boiling cauldron
It is not any soup
it boils for hours
for generations
for centuries
it is love
it is healing
Created when a Jew with herbs would be put to death
when healers were suspect
it became a secret potion
medicine disguised as soup
the power of love and boiled bones and tears
as Cossacks circle the village planning their attack
as the bones boil
the child in the crib
receives the precious fluid, broth dropped onto the
tongue
gently
and a sweaty lock of hair brushed aside
and soft boiled vegetables
their savor mingled with the pungent gamy bird
She will hold you while you cry
and your belly warm and full
you will sleep
when you awaken you will be well

Emma Rosenthal is an artist, writer, educator, political activist and mother living in Southern California.

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TANGLED LIVES

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Lillian B. Rubin

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mothers if we are Women."—Virginia Woolf

Women with Ph.D.s . . . and their

by Charlotte Margolis Goodman

A narrow bookcase was the first object I always noted when I entered the small, immaculate apartment of my mother. This bookcase contained the "treasures" she carefully had culled from a much larger collection of her books when she moved into an assisted living community some years ago. Among those volumes were a tattered housewife's guide to celebrating the Jewish holidays; a worn book summarizing the plots of the operas she loves; a number of novels and memoirs by women such as Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Jean Stafford, Bella Chagall and May Sarton that I had given her over the years; a scrapbook of family memorabilia; and, on the top shelf, copies of assorted publications written by her twin daughters and three of her granddaughters, all of whom had earned doctorates during her lifetime.

To appreciate what those Ph.D.s signified to my mother, it is necessary to know something about her own history. In 1908, when she was five, she emigrated from a *shtetl* in Russia to a small town in Pennsylvania. Although she had wanted to become a teacher, there was no money for college, so she worked as a bookkeeper until she married my father, another poor immigrant from Russia. At that time she was earning more than he, but he insisted that it was the man's job to support the family. Somewhat reluctantly, she settled into domesticity. Slowly he built up what would become a very successful business, fulfilling the American Dream for them and their three daughters. To her today, the educational achievements of her daughters and granddaughters are sources of pride. She not only displays our publications but reads them, and she is still pleased when we bring her books we have enjoyed or when we describe to her our current intellectual pursuits.

I purposely chose to begin this narrative with a positive image of my mother and her progeny, since I would like to think of her as a benignant presence in my life, someone who was unfailingly attentive to my needs, supportive of my aspirations, and willing to let me explore a path that was different from hers. Yet, during my childhood this same mother was also the one who insisted that I clean my messy room instead of playing "Go to the Head of the Class"; the person who was more concerned about my manners than my math scores; the frightening adult who exploded in anger whenever she discovered I had been reading in the bathroom, to which I retreated regularly to escape her incessant demands that I help with the housework. When I myself became a housewife, it was her image as the proverbial Jewish "balabusta," a housewife par excellence, with which I wrestled when attempting to establish a very different identity.

Like Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver and Louisa May Alcott's Jo March, I often was angry during my childhood. I was frequently chastised by my mother for preferring play to housework, books to dishcloths. I vividly recall the "game" my mother invented to suppress my anger: She would cajole me to open the lid of the kitchen garbage pail, throw my angry face away, and come away smiling. While I enjoyed the amused response this garnered from members of my family, I recognize now that my mother's attempts to short-circuit my angry outbursts allowed her to disregard the reasons, some of them legitimate, for my anger. Recently, at a family gathering, my mother mentioned that my twin sister frequently used to try to intercede on my behalf, explaining to my mother that I was not "bad," merely misunderstood. But to my mother, a compulsive housekeeper, a

daughter whose priorities differed from hers was not to be tolerated. Having raised three children of my own, I can now appreciate how easily rampant disorder can impede the smooth functioning of a household; moreover, I can understand why keeping the house neat was so important to my mother, who had grown up in a cramped, shabby apartment behind her mother's store. Nevertheless, my mother's obsession with the mundane details of housekeeping and her insistence that her three daughters, too, spend much of their time tidying the nest despite the fact that we had full-time household help was a great source of tension for my sisters and me.

When I picture my mother during my childhood, I usually recall an irritable woman, frowning as she cooked the meals or counted the sheets that were returned from the laundry. She did not tell jokes—my father's specialty—nor can I picture her reading any of the books she had ordered from the Book-of-the-Month Club or telling us stories or discussing with us what we had learned in school. Until we were grown, my sisters and I were not aware of our mother's interest in opera, the theater, and art. I was surprised to learn from her recently that sometimes, when she was feeling overwhelmed by her responsibilities, she would travel from Brooklyn to Manhattan by subway to spend the day in an art gallery or a museum, for when she returned home, she never described those solitary excursions to us. And when she would take my sisters and me to the city, she dragged us from counter to counter in Macy's or Lord & Taylor, not to an art exhibit or a theater.

I am certain that my mother was pleased when my twin sister and I were accepted by an Ivy League women's college. In the album on her bookshelf are the letters of commendation about us that she and my father received from the Dean of Students each year. In my own album I also have a telegram saying "PROUD OF YOUR BEING PHI BATED NEWS APPRECIATED AND CELEBRATED" that they sent to us from Bermuda following our election to Phi Beta Kappa. However, I cannot recall her ever questioning me about what I planned to do with my splendid education after I graduated from Wellesley College in 1955.

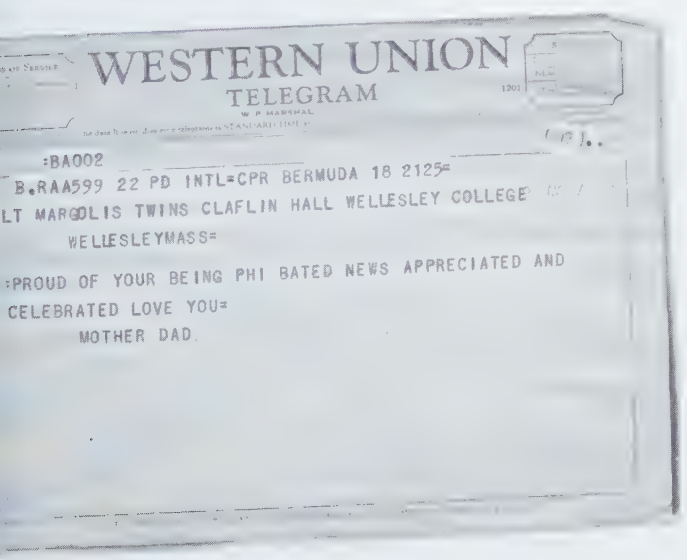
My twin sister had married at the end of junior year; so did I a year later. Only two days elapsed between the sunny June day in 1955 that I marched down the aisle to receive my undergraduate diploma and the day I walked down the aisle in a bridal gown. Delighted that the last of her daughters, the "difficult one," was married, my mother anticipated, as I myself did, that I would stay at home to take care of my children once I became a mother. I tried my hand at teaching high school, found it less than satisfying, and then settled into domesticity and awaited the birth of my first child.

What propelled me back to graduate school when I was the mother of a three-year-old daughter and a one-year-old son was the desire to teach literature at the college level and to create a life for myself that I thought would be more intellectually challenging than my mother's. My husband, then an overworked medical resident, was home very little, and though I enjoyed being a mother to our two very sweet toddlers, I nevertheless longed to be part of a community of intellectuals. I often have been asked, "Which women were your role models when you decided to pursue a doctorate?" My mother certainly did not serve in that capacity, nor was she very supportive when I told her what I planned to do. The only positive female role models I recall were the aunt of a college boyfriend who, I was told, had earned a doctorate in art history some decades earlier, and two married women professors with children who had taught at Wellesley College when I was a student there. Much closer to me than any of these women with Ph.D.s was my own twin sister, who had begun a doctoral program in the History of Ideas right after college. During the six years she had been enrolled in the program, however, she spent most of her time attending to the needs of her doctor-husband and two toddlers; she still recalls her own turmoil during that period because she could not decide whether she wanted her graduate studies to be anything more than a hobby.

My mother and I reached the nadir of our relationship ten years after I returned to graduate school, when I finally completed the requirements for a doctorate in English and American Literature at Brandeis University. In the spring of 1971 I returned to Brandeis to defend my dissertation on Henry James. My mother had not often been in a position to assist me with child-care. However, on the day that I was scheduled to defend my dissertation, I asked her to stay with my three children, the youngest of whom was seven years old. One of my most bitter memories is my mother's reaction when I returned home triumphantly that evening. A friend who had

Two Generations of Women Describe the Tensions

mothers



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WELLESLEYMASS=
:PROUD OF YOUR BEING PHI BATED NEWS APPRECIATED AND
CELEBRATED LOVE YOU=
MOTHER DAD.

Above: Congratulatory telegram to Charlotte and her sister on their election to Phi Beta Kappa.

Left: Charlotte's mother, Margaret, with her daughters on her 90th birthday.

arrived at my house with a celebratory bottle of champagne invited my mother to join in a toast to me. Sounding annoyed, she called from my sons' untidy bedroom, "I don't drink champagne" and refused to come downstairs. Was she angry at having been left in charge of my somewhat chaotic household, whose closets and drawers I had neglected while I was trying to complete my dissertation? It is also possible that she was threatened by the realization that I had accomplished what she herself never had had the freedom to attempt; or as I can well understand now that I myself am a grandmother, she simply might have been too tired by her day of babysitting to join in the festivities. Whatever her reasons, so disheartened was I by her response that I did not have the courage then—or later—to confront her about what I thought of as one of the more chilling moments in our mother-daughter relationship.

One summer, my mother agreed to take a writing class for senior citizens I was teaching at Skidmore College. Although my mother insisted at the outset that she did not want to feel obligated to do any of the writing assignments, before the week was over she did write two very fine essays that also revealed a surprising similarity between her sentence structure and my own. During that week, I very much enjoyed sharing my teaching life with her, and I believe she enjoyed taking part in the course. On the day the class concluded, however, she began to make hostile comments about my housekeeping. This time a mature adult rather than a sulky child confronted her. I reminded her that she herself had witnessed how demanding my teaching schedule had been. "Where would I have found the time to clean the house during this very busy week?" I asked her. I suspect that her criticizing me was not only a response to my less-than-neat house; it also probably reflected her need to re-establish the hierarchical mother-daughter relationship that she might have felt was undermined when her daughter became her teacher. Nevertheless, after I

I have never fully reconciled

calmly defended my behavior, she apologized and thanked me warmly for arranging to have her participate in my class.

No doubt many of my acquaintances see me as that enviable person who has "had it all": a satisfying career and the pleasures of family life; an office of my own and a comfortable suburban home; friends and colleagues. I often remind myself, moreover, how fortunate I was to have had a first-rate education, the necessary funds to pay for graduate school and babysitters, and the opportunity to teach at an excellent college. Yet never having reconciled fully those two competing personae within myself, the "balabusta" and the English professor, I often have felt that I was being pulled apart. My left hand forms the matzah balls for chicken soup while my right

Andrea adds . . . A Daughter's Perspective

by Andrea Goodman Hansell

Five years after my mother and grandmother sat together in that sunny garden, I sat in the audience as my mother, who was being honored as the Moseley Scholar of the Year at Skidmore College, delivered a lecture on the topic of literary biography. I listened spellbound as my mother spoke with wisdom, passion and authority, and found myself choking back tears as the standing-room-only audience broke into thunderous applause. These tears reflected my tremendous pride in my mother's accomplishments, and my recognition that the woman I recalled chafing at the bit as a housewife, crying in frustration over crumbled tart shells and chaotic cabinets, burning the soup she was stirring as she read *Ulysses*, had found a domain in which she could truly shine.

I would not do justice, though, to my own profession (my Ph.D. is in clinical psychology) if I described my tears only as tears of joy. I think that I cried, too, because I was the child who ate the burned soup, whose possessions disappeared in those overflowing cabinets, who viewed Henry James, the subject of my mother's doctoral dissertation, as a flesh-and-blood rival for my mother's love and attention. I also cried because six months earlier I had left my prestigious job as a staff psychologist at the University of Michigan Medical Center to pursue, as my mother puts it, "the mommy track," and I recognized that I myself would be giving no honorary lectures for the foreseeable future.

Although my decision to leave my university position was made slowly and carefully, the moment that solidified this decision arrived on a night when, having thrown Happy Meals and crayons at my then five-year-old daughter and two-year-old son, I spent the evening on the phone monitoring the status of a suicidal adolescent boy whom I had sent to the emergency room earlier that day. When I finally tucked my daughter into bed that night, she said plaintively, "Mommy, it seems

like you care about that bad boy at work more than you care about us." I am sure that "bad boy" never realized what he had in common with Henry James, but I realized then what I share with my mother, both positively and negatively, and, more important, what my daughter shared with me.

I am grateful to my mother for fos-

hand jots down ideas for this essay; my left hand plants zinnias like the ones in my mother's garden while my right hand turns the pages of a literary journal; my left hand writes a letter to my granddaughter while my right hand corrects a student's paper. Neither of my two selves ever is fully satisfied with the results of my labors—and both of my selves too often feel exhausted. My twin sister, now a professor of Humanities, often says the same.

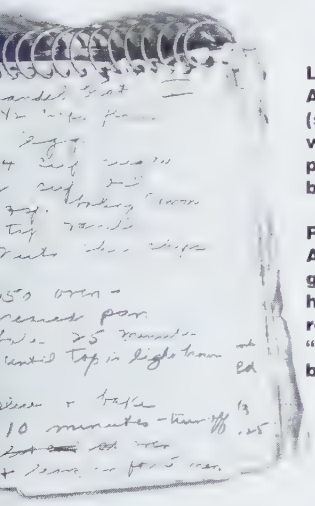
Would my own experience have been much different if my mother, too, had earned a Ph.D. and subsequently had had a rewarding career? My own daughter, Andrea, did not have the same hesitation about returning to graduate school that I did, and I believe I have been much more supportive of her efforts to pursue a career than my mother was of mine. Nevertheless, my daughter has experienced similar conflicts to my own about women's roles and responsibilities. Both she and her husband are clinical psychologists, but so stressful did she find full-time work during the years when their two children were small that she ultimately opted for the "mommy track," working only part-time and dedicating much of her energy to domestic and child-centered activities. Andrea is happy that she now has more time to devote to her children as well as to her home, one which more closely resembles the tidy apartment of her grandmother than the cluttered house in which my husband and I still live.

Two years ago my 91-year-old mother fractured her hip, and now is confined to a wheelchair. I am trying to let go of those bitter feelings about her that I harbored for so long. On my shelf I have a video-cassette recording of a party my friends gave for me in 1990 to celebrate the publication of the feminist literary biography I had written about the writer Jean Stafford. In this video, my white-haired, beautiful, gracious mother and I are shown sitting side by side in the sunny garden of my hosts on a blooming June afternoon. Surrounded by other members of our family, my friends, and my colleagues, both my mother and I are smiling.

vo competing personae: the "balabusta" and the English professor.

Charlotte Margolis Goodman, Ph.D., is a Professor of English at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. She is the author of a feminist literary biography, Jean Stafford: The Savage Heart, *and numerous articles. The wife of a retired physician, she has a grown daughter, two grown sons, and five grandchildren.*

tering my intellectual development. However, it was my grandmother's example I followed after I left my job, when I organized my own closets and baked what seemed like an endless series of cupcakes for school events for which I finally had the time to volunteer. As a child, I had been calmed and reassured by the domestic rituals my grandmother performed; as long as she was in the laundry room folding sheets, or in the kitchen baking mandelbrot, it seemed nothing terrible or unpredictable could happen in the world. I wanted my children to grow up in such order. I also wanted my children to feel that they were at the center of our home, rather than to feel pushed to the side by their parents' work, whether that work was professional or domestic (as my grandmother's was). I realized that, despite my long-standing rivalry with Henry James, I had gotten more of my mother's time and energy than she had gotten from her own mother, who chose to focus on having the cleanest floors and the best made-from-scratch fishcakes rather than on the needs and feelings of her children.



Left: Andrea (standing) with her parents and brothers.

Right: Andrea's grandmother's handwritten recipe for "Mandel brot II."

My hope is to find the steep, curving and elusive path that combines the nurturing of my family with my own career development, and even allows me time for other things, things that make life fun. I hope that there will be time in the future for me to follow my mother's example and write a book or give an honorary lecture. I confess, however, that my ambition to shine professionally is much less strong than my mother's, perhaps because I didn't have to fight tradition.

I wish I could see into the future and trace the path of my own daughter, now twelve, who speaks blithely of wanting to have lots of children while working as a veterinarian and being a sculptor and novelist on the side. My daughter snuggles under the afghan my grandmother crocheted for her and admires its even stitches, but she also loves to inspect the book jacket of the biography my mother wrote. I hope, too, that my own hodgepodge of choices will make sense to her, though I know all too well that it is necessary for each daughter, as my mother quotes from Adrienne Rich's poem, to look at her mother and "grow another way." ■

Andrea Goodman Hansell received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Michigan. The wife of a clinical psychologist and mother of a twelve-year-old daughter and an eight-year-old son, she has a part-time clinical practice and also works part-time as a psychologist for a private school.

(assions, grows another way"—Adrienne Rich

THE MYTH OF LA TREISAND

BY RACHEL KRANSON

It has happened to all of us at least once. Someone (a neighbor, a coworker, someone on line at the movies) sees you, an Ashkenazic Jewish woman who looks like an Ashkenazic Jewish woman. Suddenly your true features disappear, morph into *hers*, like a freaky special effect from "The Matrix" or the singers from Michael Jackson's "Black or White" video.

"Has anyone told you that you look just like Barbra Streisand?" They ask, even though your eyes are brown and not blue, your hair is almost black, your nose has its bumps in completely different places.

"Yes, many times," you reply, truthfully. There is nothing you can do. She is the icon, she is the paradigm, she is the definitive representation of all Jewish women. The rest of us can only deviate from the standard that Barbra set.

And now Babs is retreating from the spotlight. In September, at two sold-out farewell concerts at Madison Square Garden, she discussed her decision to retire from live performances. Granted, she made a similar announcement in 1994—but rumor has it that she means it this time. Her departure leaves us with many questions: What *really* connected us Jewish women—with our widely varied noses, personalities, concerns—to her? What made her stand out as the quintessential Jewish star? And, as the real Barbra retreats into myth, will we find anyone to take her place?

Judaism According to Jewhoo

What makes any celebrity into a Jewish celebrity, and why is Barbra Streisand the most Jewish of them all? While these questions may lead others to think deep thoughts about the nature of Jewish ethnicity, it leads me to www.jewhoo.com. A parody of the Yahoo search engine and the stereotypical Jewish obsession with discovering famous Jews, Jewhoo is, in essence, a list of Jewish celebrities. The editors of Jewhoo make it their business to dig deep into the biographies of famous people to find out if they have Jewish ancestry. It's an invaluable resource for those of us who are fascinated by Jewish ethnicity, new media and popular culture.

The Jewhoo website is a telling text on many levels. First of all, it highlights the fact that Jews can "pass" in American popular culture. After all, if it were completely obvious who the famous Jews were, we would not need Jewhoo to point them out.

While Jewhoo may not be the most scholarly place to look for definitions of what "makes" a Jew, the site's sense of Jewishness does help establish the ingredients of Jewish celebrity. According to Jewhoo, Jewish ancestry or conversion are the "primary" identifiers of Jewish women—the factors that make her "really" Jewish. Other factors—a Jewish "name," (or change to a non-Jewish stage name), "look," "sound" (nasal voice, New York accent) or the performance of Jewish characters—do not make a celebrity Jewish, but are relevant to how much a celebrity may be associated with Judaism. Renee Zellwegger makes it to the Jewhoo list not because she is Jewish (the editors make it clear she is not), but because of her Jewish sounding last name and the fact that she starred as a religious Jew in "A Price Above Rubies."

As Jewhoo has shown us, there is a difference between celebrities who may be Jewish by ancestry and celebrities who look, sound or act in ways that the popular culture thinks of as "Jewish." Consider, for example, actress Gwyneth Paltrow. While Paltrow does have a Jewish father (marking her, according to Jewhoo, as Jewish), she has never played a Jewish character. Her portrayals of white, Christian women (consider "Emma," "Shakespeare in Love") are not

viewed as parodies. She is not marked as Jewish by her name, her look, her voice. As her pop-icon persona does not "perform" Jewishness, she can perform characters of other identities; in fact, her blonde, thin image is so stereotypically un-Jewish that having her portray a Jewish character seems like quite a stretch. *If* we think of her as Jewish at all, she is a Jewess in some serious WASP-y drag.

Compare Gwyneth Paltrow to our beloved Barbra, for they are opposite sides of the pop-cultural Jewish image. Streisand has rarely (if ever) played a non-Jewish character. What is more, her Jewishness is not incidental to her roles ("Funny Girl," "The Way We Were," "Yentl," "Prince of Tides"). She has two Jewish parents, a "Jewish" name, look, voice, and the roles that she plays. She is Jewish by every definition; she is the quintessential Jewish popular icon.

The Way we Were

I did not grow up with Barbra. She grew to super-stardom before I was born. By the time I could talk, I could already refer to Barbra by first name (or nickname), and everyone would know who I meant. I knew that if a woman was "just like Barbra Streisand," it meant that she looked Jewish. It also meant that she was fabulously talented, well-dressed, liberal, melodramatic and slightly outdated. The only times that Barbra made it into the top 40 in my lifetime was when she performed duets with other (not very hip) popular singers, like Bryan Adams or Celine Dion. She was becoming campy, the darling of gay men (do they love her for not passing, for being so "out"?) even as she was, to girls my age, becoming a fading diva from another generation.

For those of us who grew up in the eighties, Barbra was always slightly out-of-date; part of something glamorous and tragic, compelling and nostalgic, that was very close to us but always part of the recent past. She is a representation of American Judaism from when Jewish ethnicity truly seemed like the stuff of difference, when Jews seemed to experience a pain and passion that no one else could understand, when Jews seemed like the liberal conscience of white America and the true martyrs of history.

When Barbra played Fanny Brice in "Funny Girl," her talent far outshone that of her great-looking gentile husband (played by Omar Sharif); in the end, her great (Jewish) passion and commitment proved incompatible with his apathetic playboy lifestyle. It was likewise preordained that Barbra would never find happiness with Robert Redford in "The Way We Were"—she was too passionate, too dedicated and too outspoken for her "gorgeous goyische guy"; he did not have her (Jewish) capacity to suffer for righteous causes.

By the time my generation came of age, things seemed more complicated. We have seen too many happy interfaith marriages, too many images of Palestinian refugees, too many Jews turn comfortable and Republican, to understand Barbra's characters as contemporary representations of ourselves. We have seen the "Jewish-looking" women around us lighten their hair, get nose jobs, and—as in the sad but true story of "Dirty Dancing's" Jennifer Grey, who, pre-nose job, might have done for the '80s what Barbra did for the '60s and '70s—become indistinguishable from the rest of the population. Websites like Jewhoo may be interesting curiosities for those of us who hold on to the myths of Jewish difference, and yet the information it uncovers is also strangely insignificant. Knowing that younger stars like Gwyneth Paltrow or Winona Ryder have Jewish fathers does not make either celebrity seem any more Jewish, and the myth of Barbra fades farther and farther into the distance.

In a 1977 interview with *Playboy*, Barbra mentioned that she had thought about having a nose job operation. In the end, she rejected the idea after being told that surgery would affect the sound and resonance of her voice. For me, this anecdote is the essence of the myth of Barbra. Her Jewish nose is a perfect vessel crafted by the Almighty, with bumps and hollows uniquely capable of creating the resonance of her remarkable voice. For Barbra, the things that make her ethnic are the keys to her great talent; without the Jewish nose, there could be no Barbra.

For the rest of us, things are not so simple. For contemporary American Jews, Judaism exists as a choice, even when we feel as if we have no choice. We choose whether or not to be active in the Jewish community, to keep our Jewish noses, to work on behalf of the downtrodden or to suffer for righteous causes. We also realize that none of these characteristics is an essential quality of being Jewish: Jews are many things, and can look, act and live in the most "goyische" of ways.

As the real Barbra retreats into myth, will we find anyone to take her place?

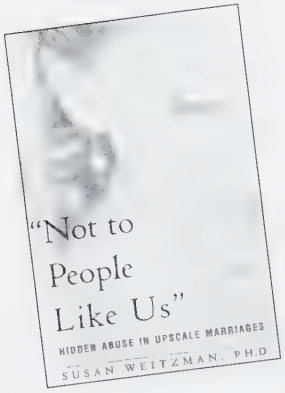
The myth of Barbra is the myth of the *essentially Jewish* Jewish woman. According to the myth, Jewish women are passionate, outspoken, liberal, talented, Semitic looking, and from Brooklyn. Even before Barbra's retirement, the myth seemed like a thing of the past—and we know that it never really existed. And yet the myth still resonates, as richly and as melodramatically as the ballads that flow forth from the chambers of Barbra's glorious nose ... the misty watercolor memories of the way we (never really) were. ■

Rachel Kranson recently received her Masters in Jewish Women's Studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary. She is currently watching a lot of Streisand movies and looking for a full-time job.

book

Not to People Like Us: Domestic Abuse in Upscale Families

by Susan Weitzman
Basic Books, $26



Susan Weitzman's new book, *Not to People Like Us, Domestic Abuse in Upscale Families,* is an excellent primer on the fundamentals of partner abuse: what it is, what are the signs and symptoms, theories of causation and interventions. It is also a fascinating examination of a significant segment of abused women, those from what she calls "upscale families," who have until now received very little attention. Dr. Weitzman has worked with these women in her own practice, and she did research about them for her dissertation, the basis for this book.

Weitzman systematically lays out the reasons that these women—highly educated with high incomes, often professionals themselves married to top professionals in their fields—have not been on the radar screen of domestic violence advocates and often have not been able to access resources that might assist them. As Weitzman describes, the reverse bias is based on false assumptions that these women have their own resources and can get out of their dangerous relationships on their own. It is compounded by a "veil of silence," perpetuated by the myth that domestic violence doesn't happen to the affluent woman. Too often, even when these women ask for help, their request is greeted with disbelief and dismissed.

Disproving the myth that domestic abuse doesn't happen to high-powered women.

Weitzman provides important insights into why women with the financial and professional resources to leave find it so hard to extricate themselves from abusive relationships: wrenching disruption of their and their children's lives; loss of income and status; as well as fear for their lives. Too frequently high-achieving women, who have mastered so much in their lives, feel that they can overcome this challenge too, much to their detriment.

Weitzman also makes clear that too often these abused women are turned away by the professionals from whom they seek help. A cultural climate, she argues, needs to be created so that any woman who comes forward does not have to fear that her claims will be met with derision. Doctors, social workers, lawyers, clerics need to be sensitized to the fact that abuse cuts across all socio-economic strata.

This is an excellent book, accessible to the lay public and substantive for professionals in the field. Hopefully it will be widely read and will help put to bed the myth that the well-to-do woman is safe from abuse.

—Anita Altman

The Literary Imagination of Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women: An Assessment of a Writing Community

by Alyse Fisher Roller
McFarland & Company, $29.95

Whenever I go into Jewish bookstores, I'm fascinated by what seems to be a new type of Jewish literature by a group of women considered to be the most silenced in Judaism—the ultra-Orthodox. These women, mostly known for their large families and absence from public Jewish ritual, are publishing volumes of child-raising advice, essays and poetry, spiritual memoirs and self-help that mix cultural feminism, popular psychology and Orthodox-filtered "Torah wisdom." It's a genre ripe for feminist analysis, which is why I was initially pleased to find this study by Alyse Fisher Roller.

Roller analyzes personal narratives, anthologies, Holocaust memoirs, self-help books and fiction written by ultra-Orthodox American and Israeli women, and attempts to place them in the context of traditional Judaism, Jewish feminist writing and feminist literary criticism. She proposes three central theses: one, ultra-Orthodox women's writings respond to and denounce liberal feminist and Jewish feminist arguments while sometimes promoting certain feminist ideas; two, because ultra-Orthodox women's lives are misrepresented in critical studies, their literature is the best source to hear their true voices; and, three, there are two distinct voices in ultra-Orthodox women's writing: the feminist, self-reflective narrative of *baalot tshuva* (newly observant) women, and the masculine, traditional voice of FFB ("frum-from-birth") women.

For Jewish feminists, Roller's study will be a frustrating read. Despite her claims that she is going to let the authors speak for themselves, she rarely quotes their works. She also includes many subtle and not so subtle slurs against contemporary Jewish feminist thought. This includes a few glaring mistakes in citing sources. When she identifies Christian feminist Bible scholar Phyllis Trible as a "tradition-focused Jewish feminist" or offers as a proof text for Orthodox feminism's success, *Rereading the Rabbis* (a work by Conservative-movement affiliated scholar Judith Hauptman), it is hard to know whether Roller is being merely careless or dismissive of Jewish feminism.

Roller's work is the first to address this unique genre of Jewish women's literature. Jewish feminist thought made a book like hers possible, not only for inspiring the works she critiques, but also by making her topic an acceptable one, worthy of analysis.

Surely there is a way to both critique and appreciate the literature of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women without making gratuitous negative comments about contemporary Jewish feminism.

—*Susan Sapiro*

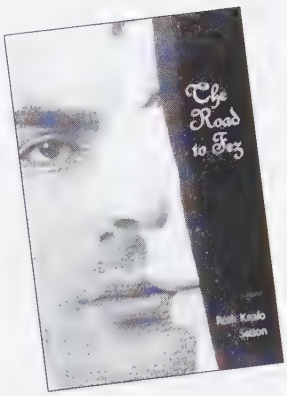
The Road to Fez

by Ruth Knafo Setton
Counterpoint Press, $23 (forthcoming in February)

Emblematic of the struggle with the memories and the tugging demands of an Orthodox Jewish past are the writings of Ruth Knafo Setton. Her writings are reminiscent of Isaac Bashevis Singer's or Shalom Aleichem's in telling the stories of the immigrant with one foot in the old country and a few toes in the new. But unlike her male predecessors, no uplifting theater, musical or otherwise, will ever emanate from her fiction, stories of women that are compellingly dark and dangerous.

In *The Road to Fez,* Setton tells the story of Brites Suleika Lek, who, like Setton, is Moroccan-born and American-raised. At 18, Brit has returned to her ancestral homeland. She is a naïve, unmarried young woman living among her more experienced, married woman relatives. She is a Jew in an Arab society; Americanized yet strongly attracted to her ethnic heritage. She thinks she is in love with her widowed uncle. She also wants to find out more about her namesake, the mysterious Suleika who was martyred in Fez in the 19th century when, following her conversion to Islam, she attempted to return to the Jewish community. Like Suleika, Brit "hover[s] between two worlds."

The novel is exotic and erotic, telling the story of a segregated society: Muslim vs. Jew; male vs. female; married vs. unmarried; natives vs. foreigners; powerful vs. powerless. Brit sits with her female cousins, helping in the frenetic Passover preparations, a member of her particular ghetto. "The courtyard is roofless, a secret world invisible from the street ... an intimate world turned in on itself....Women's tongues are sharp, but only in their domain: the rooftop, courtyard and kitchen, where they dissect an entire town, and then sew it back together."



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SUSAN MARTHA KAHN

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"Sophisticated and well-written, it will be welcomed not only by scholars ... but by those who are curious as to how science, religion, and the desire for children intersect within a particular context."—Faye Ginsburg, New York University

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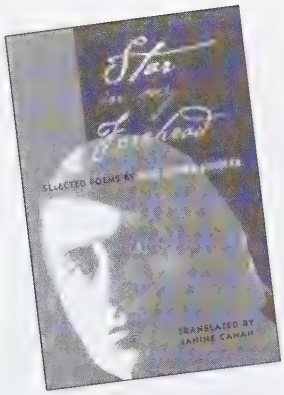

Setton candidly depicts the lives of these women, along with the often cruel (and sometimes fatal) treatment they receive because they are women in a male-dominated world. She also offers counter-voices to this culture. Her uncle reflects, "My brother-in-law, Haim, claims a woman needs brutality from a man. To be tamed and beaten and kept in her place. But look at my sister, Mamouche: a wounded, fluttering bird." He further reflects, "You don't hear a song by trampling it beneath your feet." Setton's skill in weaving legend, lore and life is awe-inspiring.

—David J. Zucker and Bonita E. Taylor

Star in My Forehead: Selected Poems by Else Lasker-Schüler
translated by Janine Canan
introduction by Beatrice Cameron
Holy Cow! Press, $12.95

Though American readers may not be familiar with Lasker-Schüler's poetic output, a new edition, *Star in My Forehead*, should quickly acquaint us with her astonishing literary gifts. The youngest of six children, Else Lasker-Schüler was born in the Rhineland in 1869 and spent her youth in Berlin. Though trained as a painter, she soon turned to poetry, publishing ten books of poetry and prose during her life; in 1932, at the age of 63, she won Germany's coveted Kleist Prize. Months later, this much-honored poet was struck by a band of Nazis waving an iron bar. Without packing a bag, Lasker-Schüler went straight to the station and boarded a train for Switzerland. Arriving penniless in Zurich, she was arrested for vagrancy and was rescued by the Swiss literary community, which organized public benefits on her behalf. By painting and writing, she was able to eke out a meager living.

In this slim but piercing dual-language volume, culled from four collections, Lasker-Schüler is by turns tender and bitter, rapturous and melancholy. She was long drawn to the ancient biblical lands and made three trips to Palestine, where she spent the last six years of her life and died in January 1945. Her poetry reflects this affection: In addition to love and loss, she takes on biblical figures as diverse as Hagar and Mary of Nazareth. Throughout all these poems there hovers a unique and mystical sensibility; for her, God was not a distant and aloof presence but one with whom she could feel intimate, even playful. "If He knew a remedy," she said to someone in her last years, "surely He would tell it to me."

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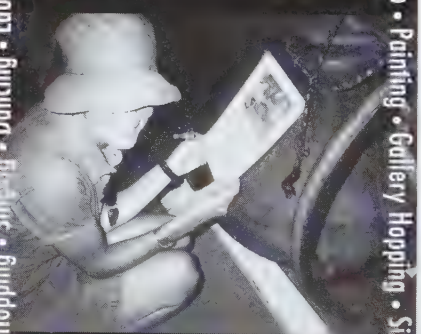

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Powerful black and white illustrations, nearly all done by the poet herself, amplify her poetic vision. Lasker-Schüler is a poet whose wildly lyrical and original work deserves attention on both sides of the Atlantic: read it and weep.

— Yona Zeldis McDonough

The Chimney Tree

by Helaine Helmreich
University Press of Colorado. $24.95

This first novel, a romantic saga making its way through the Holocaust, tells the story of a vibrant young woman, a rabbi's daughter, whose first, doomed love is for the artistic younger brother of their family's Polish Christian cook. In a failed attempt at damage control, her father arranges what turns out to be a horrifying marriage from which she learns some of the escape skills that later help her to survive the war. Helmreich evocatively paints a range of relationships: between a woman and a man, between parents and children and siblings; of life in the *shtetl* and the city, Jewish traditions of believers and non-believers, and the history of World War II on the Eastern Front. This book is deeply sad, psychologically realistic, and nevertheless appealing and inspiring in its portrait of an indomitable human impulse to live, to love, and to rebuild when it seems almost everything has been destroyed.

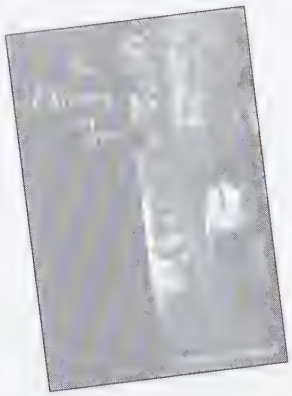
—Naomi Danis

Anita Altman is an executive at UJA-Federation of New York. She is also the founder of the UJA-Federation Task Force on Family Violence.

Yona Zeldis McDonough is Fiction Editor of Lilith. She is the editor of The Barbie Chronicles: A Living Doll Turns Forty *(Touchstone), and is currently working on a novel.*

Susan Sapiro is coordinator of the Jewish Feminist Research Group and a program associate at Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project of the JCC on the Upper West Side in New York City.

Rabbi Bonita E. Taylor is a CPE supervisor for The Jewish Institute for Pastoral Care, The HealthCare Chaplaincy, in New York and rabbi for Congregation Gan Eden in Maui, Hawaii. Rabbi David J. Zucker is director of Pastoral Care and Recreation at Shalom Park, in Aurora, Colorado. His latest book is American Rabbis: Facts and Fiction.



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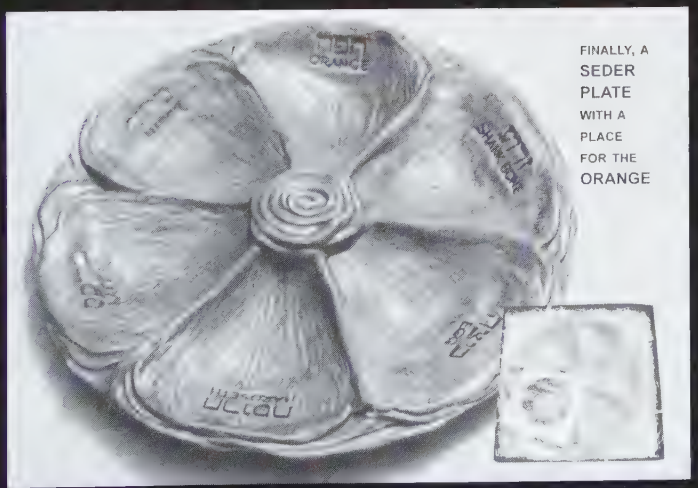

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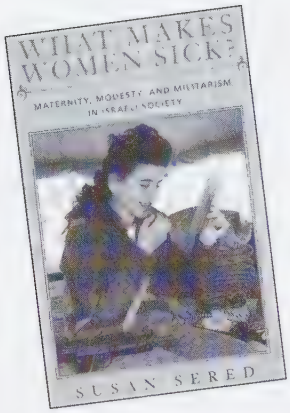
What's New on Lilith's Shelves



FICTION

New York Stories: Kate Wenner's ***Setting Fires*** (Scribner) follows a New York filmmaker investigating two fires that dominate her life....Lynn Sharon Schwartz's ***In the Family Way*** (Harper Perennial) peeps in on the sexual and social lives of an extended family in a building on the Upper West Side.

Historically Speaking: Nomi Eve's ***The Family Orchard*** (Knopf) introduces 200 years of sprightly women in Jerusalem....Roman author Angela Bianchini explores exile through an Italian Jewish woman who flees in 1941 in ***The Edge of Europe*** (Bison Books)....In Katie Singer's sensitive debut, ***The Wholeness of a Broken Heart*** (Riverhead), four generations of women carry the painful Jewish history in Europe and America.

Coming of Age: A cheeky narrative, Julianna Baggot's ***Girl Talk*** (Pocket Books) follows Lissy Jablonski, 30, in her memories of a slapstick summer and her musing on becoming her mom....Andee Hochman's ***Anatomies*** (Picador) introduces lively young women on the verge of finding their unusual places in the world....Molly Jong-Fast (daughter of Erica Jong) debuts with ***Normal Girl*** (Villard), a tale of growing up in the fast lane.

NON-FICTION

Lives and Letters: The work of therapist Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (fictionalized in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*), her marriage to Erich Fromm and escape from the Nazis are chronicled in Gail Hornstein's biography, ***To Redeem One Person Is to Redeem the World*** (Free Press)....In ***Einstein's Daughter***, Michele Zackheim's pursuit of a vanished girl drives a damning portrayal of the famous Albert....The first complete edition of Hannah Arendt's biography, ***Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess,*** explores German-Jewish identity through the 18th century salon hostess. The love affair between Arendt and her husband is now public in ***Within Four Walls: The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher*** (Harcourt)....Linda Hunt Beckman revives an activist feminist and English woman of letters in ***Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters*** (Ohio State)....***Women in Scripture,*** a dictionary edited by Carol Meyers, describes every named and unnamed women in Jewish and Christian texts (Houghton Mifflin).

From the Ivory Tower: Two new studies look at

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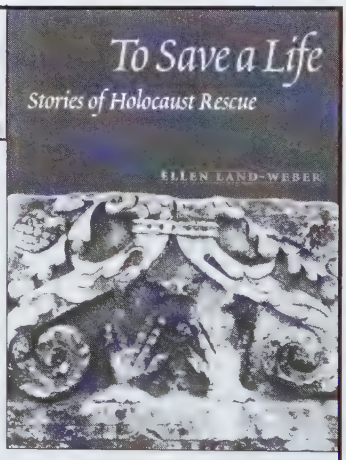

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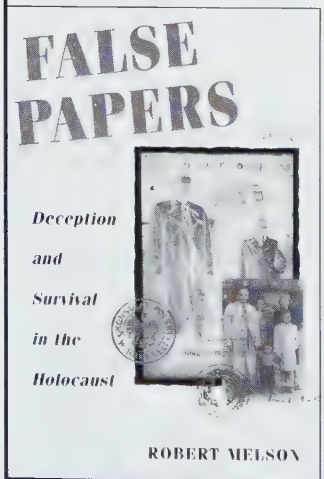

"Robert Melson's fascinating, honest, and disturbing memoir is both thriller and sensitive reflection on the dilemmas of being human. I found the book deeply moving and impossible to put down."
— Roger Smith, past president, Association of Genocide Scholars

False Papers is the story of a Jewish family, the Mendelsohns, who survived the Holocaust by living in the open as not just ordinary Polish Catholics but as the Zamojskis, a Polish family of noble lineage.

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women's "purity." ***Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender*** (Stanford) by Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert argues that commentary on women's bodies associated women with the home and excluded them from rabbinic study halls. The essays in ***Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*** (Brandeis), edited by Rahel R. Wasserfall, explore the debate around impurity....Anthropologist Susan Sered's ***What Makes Women Sick? Maternity, Modesty, and Militarism in Israeli Society*** (Brandeis), investigates why "Israeli women are sicker and die younger than their counterparts in other western countries."

Oy Vey: The book ***What To Do When You're Dating a Jew*** might help the neophyte date but indulges in stereotypes galore: the Jewish mother "knows that her input is crucial" on tuna salad or your weekend plans, and while "the mother is in charge of the home, the father is charged with being the breadwinner." — *SB*

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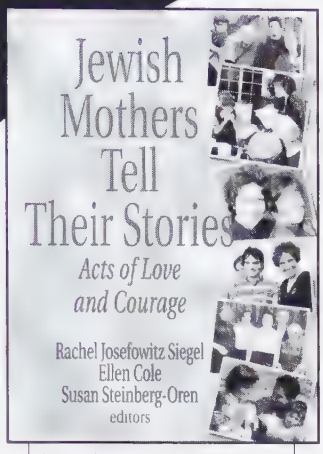

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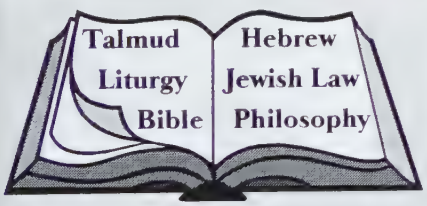

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HaSha'ar is funded by a major grant from the Nash Family Foundation

continued from page 9

nal plate. It's almost as if they did not realize that they had choices about relationships and family and they are extremely annoyed that you think that you do.

Lois J. Greene-Hernandez
via- e-mail

About the Spring 2000 section on weddings: As a woman who kept my "own" (as you say, my father's) name after marriage, I do want to protest those quotation marks. First, my father's name is the name by which I have been known on every document from kindergarten drawings to SAT scores, from U.S. Form 1040 to leases to contracts to credit cards bills. Because the name has referred to me since my birth, it has come to be my own. Second, and just as important, I prefer using my own father's name to using my husband's father's name.

Claudia R. Chernov
New York, NY

Visions of Lilith

As a former secular (now traditional) Jew, I have never felt more spoken to about who I am than by your magazine. I recognize how many of us become Liliths in the workplace, demonized for the simple expectation of being regarded as equal to our male counterparts. I have experienced the rage, both cloaked and open, directed at us by men who resent that. I wish I could say that those circumstances have changed over the years. They have not, which is why your voice is more essential than ever. Thank you for giving me a Jewish feminist community, and for helping me to stay determined, and for giving my husband and me the vision to raise our two-year-old daughter as a future Lilith!

Elizabeth Schwartz
New York, NY

I am not Jewish but I do know the history behind Lilith. Why would you name a magazine after such an awful woman? No matter if she did stand up to God and Adam in the garden of Eden, she took the lives of innocent children for her revenge! How can you perpetuate such a violent and awful woman as your figurehead.

Dena Leichnitz
via e-mail

Editor's note: Lilith is a creation of Jewish tradition. Nowhere in the Bible is she mentioned, either as a baby-killer or as a seductress of men. Those interpretations were imposed on the character of this independent woman by misogynist commentators.

I agree with the reader who said that Lilith seems "so sad" (Editor's note, Fall 2000). I believe this is a problem of progressive movements in general and of some of feminism. It's always a hard job to point to the glass half full. And it can get tedious. However, Judaism, particularly the Shabbat service, has many rituals and prayers related to gratitude. Left to our own chattering brains and sense of conscience we'll go on with those lists you mention: What I didn't do, what I couldn't do better, what hurt, what went wrong, what I want that I don't have. For me, Jewish prayer gives a way to say thank you, how beautiful is creation.

Michele Clark
Plainfield, VT

What Color Is Jewish?

Penny Rosenwasser's article, "I Thought I Knew You" (Summer 2000) made a big impression on me. When I attended the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, I was very attracted to the Womyn of Color tent, but embarrassed that I didn't have a right to be there. As a Jew, I have felt like a woman of color my whole life.

I visited Israel many years ago. The freedom I felt there was unmistakable. It had not previously entered my consciousness that I was *not* feeling comfortable about being Jewish back home. I had felt slightly "other," and thought it was just lack of confidence. But the surprising lightness I felt in Israel helped me see that I had gotten messages that being a Jew was, well, maybe not exactly a bad thing, but not a good thing either. A few years after my visit to Israel, I moved to a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. The atmosphere held the same alright-ness about being Jewish.

I could relate to Penny's description of shrinking when someone hollered, "How many copies of the Jewish piece do we need?" in front of her (not necessarily Jewish) co-workers. As a teenager, and later at college, I had sometimes been criticized and occasionally ostracized for being too smart, too funny, too loud, and the underlying identification I felt was: "Too Jewish." I no longer feel invisible, or like I'm passing for white until questioned, thank God.

Deborah-Miriam
Medford, OR

Looking for Taubi

I am asking for help to find a woman called Taubi from Muncacz. I was born in 1929 in Tokai Hungary, and arrived at Birkenau in May 1944. I was in a *lager*. A woman by the name of Aliska was in charge of my block. The number tattooed on my arm is A6766. Taubi's number should be similar. I was among 20 girls chosen to go from Birkenau to Auschwitz every day. We worked in the fields and in the gardens of the S.S. officers. Taubi and I were together. She had had a younger sister who was about my age. After they were separated, she "adopted" me. She was about two years older than me and was extremely good to me. We were both moved to Auschwitz and worked in the sewing and mending section. We walked together in the "Death March" and stayed together till we were liberated in Neustadt-Gelbe in May 1945.

I would very much like to meet her again, hear about her life and thank her for her kindness. She would be about 73 years old today. Please contact MiRonW.fam@usa.net or NaomiWulfsohn@hotmail.com.

Chaya Rachel Herczl
(née Rosenberg)
via e-mail

Corrections

Lilith incorrectly characterized the American Jewish Historical Society as a recent development in our Fall 2000 issue. The AJHS, founded in 1892, is the oldest ethnic history association in the United States. The Society has just dedicated new quarters at the Center for Jewish History, in Manhattan, which is directed by Dr. Michael Feldberg.

Rosie and the Mole was published by Pispopany Press; *Baby's Bris* was published by Kar-Ben. The publishers were reversed in our Fall 2000 issue.

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Liturgical Dance. Movement in religious education? Choreography on religious themes? Dance—a tool for community building? Find all three in a program to train movement specialists for religious institutions. *Joanne Tucker, Avodah, 243 5th St., #9, Jersey City, NJ 07032; (201)659-7072; avodah@worldnet.att.net*

Gildin Yiddish Book Scholarships enable full time students of Yiddish to purchase books from the *National Yiddish Book Center, 1021 West St., Amherst, MA 01002-3375; (413)256-4900; fax (413)256-4700; yiddish@bikher.org*

Take Action

Hotline for victims of trafficking. The Department of Justice has a hotline to report suspected situations of people lured to the United States to become prostitutes or domestic slaves. You may call anonymously: *(888)428-7581*

The International Jewish Women's Human Rights Watch addresses the injustices suffered by Jewish women trapped by Jewish divorce law. *IJWHRW, 13 Tel Hai St., 92107 Jerusalem Israel; (972)2-561-9281; fax (972-2)561-9112; jcpa@netvision.net.il* or send US tax-deductible contributions to: *IJWHRW, Center for Jewish Community Studies, 1616 Walnut St., Philadelphia, PA 19103.*

The Newsletter of Family Planning Advocates of New York reports that through the efforts of lobbyists New York remains the only state in the Union with no abortion restriction laws. Membership is $25/year. *FPA, 17 Elk St., Albany, NY 12207; (518)436-8408; www.fpaofnys.org*

Family Elder Caregiving: The Grotta Report on Philanthropic Trends and Best Practice Models, by Irene A. Gutheil and Roslyn H. Chernesky, highlights creative programs that strengthen and support family caregivers in their crucial and irreplaceable roles. *The Grotta Foundation for Senior Care, 76 S. Orange Ave., #305, S. Orange, NJ 07079; (973)761-4900; fax (973)313-1240; Grotta1@aol.com*

An Alzheimer's website offers a monthly poll, tips on coping and care, ask-an-expert Q&As, online journals, access to local chapters, job listings and a way to make secure donations on line to *Alzheimer's Association, 919 N. Michigan Ave., #1100, Chicago, IL 60611-1676; (312)335-8700; fax (312)335-1110; www.alz.org*

A prize in Jewish feminist fiction. Vibrant, compelling and original stories with heart, soul and chutzpah, short stories that illuminate issues central to the lives of contemporary Jewish women may be sent for a contest in celebration of Lilith Magazine's 25th anniversary. The winning entry will be published in the magazine and its author will receive an honorarium of $250. Manuscripts should be double spaced and should not exceed 2,500 words; no manuscripts will be returned. Deadline: February 1, 2001. For a sample issue, please contact *LILITH, 250 W. 57th St., #2432, New York, NY 10107; 1-888-2-LILITH; lilithmag@aol.com; www.lilithmag.com*

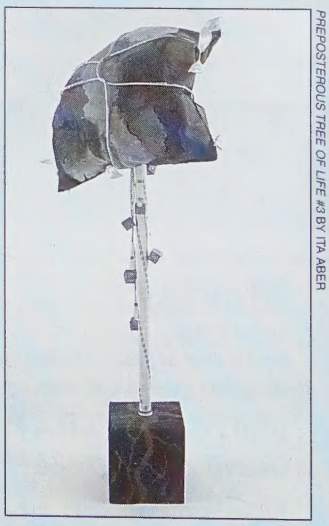
Events

"I have designed *tefillin* for women," writes Ayana Friedman, represented in this exhibit by her Throne of Deborah used for baby girl naming ceremonies. 149 other artists join her in celebrating Jewish time in an exhibit at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Through June 29, 2001 at *HUC-JIR Museum, One West 4th St., New York, NY 10012 and HUC-JIR Skirball Museum, 3101 Clifton Ave, Cincinnati, OH 45220.*

Women's Yiddish Voices, a weekend conference featuring Kathryn Hellerstein, Beatrice Weinreich, Irena Klepfisz, Troim Katz Handler, Adrienne Cooper, Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman and Norma Fain Pratt, February 24-25 begins with a Saturday night concert. *Yiddishkayt Los Angelos, 1714 N. Whitley Ave., Hollywood, CA 90028; (323)692-8151; yiddishkaytla@earthlink.net; www.yiddishkaytla.org*

Poet Shirley Kaufman, an American immigrant living in Israel, will read her own poems and others from *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present* (The Feminist Press), which she co-edited and translated. March 1, 6:30 pm at a reading co-sponsored by Lilith Magazine and the Office of Cultural Affairs Israel Consulate in New York at the *Museum of Jewish Heritage, One Battery Park Plaza, New York, NY 10004; (212)968-1800.*

Ita Aber: a 55-year retrospective exhibit of works by the object-maker that draws on Jewish history, tradition, ritual and culture, humor and gender analysis. A monograph includes essays and 100 illustrations. January 9-28, reception January 13, 5:30-9pm. *Broome St. Gallery, 498 Broome St., New York, NY 10013; (212)877-7311.*



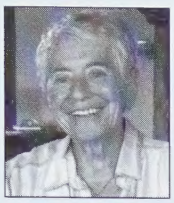
PREPOSTEROUS TREE OF LIFE #3 BY ITA ABER

Role Models

Timbrels and Torahs, a documentary film celebrating aging in a youth-obsessed culture introduces a rite of passage ceremony—*Simchat Hochmah,* a ceremony of wisdom—for Jewish women making the transition from their mid life to their elder years. Featuring political activist Marcia Cohn Spiegel, biblical scholar Savina Teubal, and filmmaker Miriam Chaya. Debbie Friedman, Blu Greenberg, Sue Levi Elwell, Drora Setel and Marca Falk also appear. *Joy of Wisdom Productions 8898 Terrace Dr., El Cerrito, CA 94530; (510)525-4020; Mirchaya@aol.com; www.timbrelsandtorahs.com*

Miriam Chaya

Marcia Cohn Spiegel


Savina Teubal

"Madame" Beatrice Alexander, famed dollmaker**, Gertrude Belle Elion**, who developed drugs for the treatment of rejection of tranplanted organs, and **Ray Frank**, religious leader who created the first Jewish congregation in Spokane Falls, WA, in 1890 are this year's honorees for women's history month. Posters and resource guides available from *The Jewish Women's Archive (617)232-2258, or Ma'yan (212)580-0099; www.jwa.org*

Earthshaking Women: 20th Century Rebels and Peacemakers are featured in a 2001 desk calendar, $12. *War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012.*

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel website lists—in Hebrew, Arabic and English—its tours, trips and educational activities. A current environmental protection campaign aims to stop the destruction of the underwater paradise of the Gulf of Eilat where the brilliant coral reef is dying. *SPNI, 4 Hashfela St., 66183 Tel Aviv, Israel; (972-3)638-8653; fax (972-3)537-4561; www.teva.org.il*

Children who use wheelchairs, walkers or canes or who have sensory or developmental disabilities finally have an accessible playground where they can use most of the play equipment. Jonathan's Dream, opened in 1996 at the West Hartford Jewish Community Center, was created by Amy Jaffe Barzach as a memorial to her son. She also founded Boundless Playgrounds in Bloomfield, CT, which assists groups to initiate universal playgrounds anywhere in the world. *www.boundlessplaygrounds.org*

Special Needs. At last: Parents can find Hebrew school, bar/bat mitzvah training, social events, and advocacy help for a developmentally disabled youngster. Elderly caregivers can be guided in making provisions for a disabled adult child. And families can find support groups to cope with the demands of helping a child with disabilities reach her/his full potential. A directory lists programs of UJA agencies. Free. *UJA Federation of New York, 130 E. 59th St., New York, NY 10022; (212)836-1609.*

Healing

Jewish women stay in abusive relationship an average 5-7 years longer than non-Jewish women. Jewish women who leave an abusive relationship tend to be in their late 30s or 40s; most non-Jewish women are in their 20s and early 30s. Professionals estimate that 15% to 20% of Jewish women are abused by their spouses, a rate consistent among all Jewish denominations. Domestic violence is the leading cause of death among all women, causing them more injuries than rape, mugging or car accidents. The Task Force on Family Violence of UJA-Federation of New York, founded in 1993, has a new 25-page resource directory. *UJA Federation of New York, 130 E. 59th St., New York, NY 10022; (212)836-1609.*

Coping with the holidays while you're grieving is the theme of a special issue of Journeys, the monthly bereavement newsletter of the Hospice Foundation of America. Other special issues are: for the newly bereaved; for those marking the anniversary of a loss; one for adolescents written by young people; as well as one for those assisting children and adolescents with issues relating to loss. To receive one, send a SASE to *HFA, 2001 S St. NW, #300, Washington, DC 20009. (800)854-3402; www.hospicefoundation.org*

Your Writing

Modern Tkhines. Do you write prayers? For a book of prayers relating specifically to women's lives, though not limited to lifecycle events, send yours to *Tali Rosenblatt, 110. W. 96th St., #4C, New York, NY 10025; (212)662-3414; taliros@aol.com*

For The Yale Women's Seder Sourcebook, send your Passover reflections, commentaries, poems and alternative *haggadah* texts. Contributors include Aviva Zornberg, Judith Plaskow, Paula Hyman and perhaps you. Send up to 500 words by February 1 to *Tara Mohr or Catherine Spector, Yale Women's Haggadah Project, P.O. Box 203234, New Haven, CT 06520; (203)436-8088x3; tara.mohr@yale.edu or catherine.spector@yale.edu*

Jewish Daughters of Interfaith Marriages—including patrilineal, adoptive and non-biological daughters—send essays, memoir, midrash and poetry about your Jewish identity experiences. Submit up to 5,000 words by March 1 to *Reyna's Press, PMB #816, 298 4th Ave., San Francisco, CA 94118-2468; reynaspress@aol.com.*

—compiled by Naomi Danis

When you help these other worthy organizations, please consider a tax-deductible contribution to LILITH, a crucial vehicle of communication and connection for Jewish women. Mail a contribution to LILITH, 250 W. 57th St., #2432, New York, NY 10107; Call 1-888-2-LILITH or fax 212-757-5705 to contribute by credit card. Thank you!

I Buy a New Dress

by Elaine Winer

Why do you have to buy a new dress for the wedding, my husband asks. *You spend all that money and only wear it once.*

I pushed aside the snow to make a fort and saw a single blade of grass. It shouted, SPRING, to me, SPRING! And GREEN, filling my eyes, unforgettable ...

My favorite color is blue, not pure blue, but the purple mix that's called gentian. I don't know how I learned that word so young but I knew that GENTIAN was the color of my hill. I stood above the lake one fall morning and I was drenched in gentian, the color billowing, filling the hill, the sky, my senses until I thought I would fall down, the gentian-ness of the world like a religion, like God. It only happened once.

Plain BLUE isn't a bad color, though. The first time I went to Florida I stepped out of the plane and someone had replaced the gray sky with a sheet of blue. It curled around the airport, so high and full of breezes and clouds I had to giggle.

When I was eight, I spent a whole hour looking at a line of roses set against the soft gray of a stone wall. Don't ever forget this, I told myself solemnly. (Someone very old inside of me likes roses.) Roses are red and violets are blue, sugar is sweet and I love you, God, I sang to myself, my soul filled with roses. Thank you, God, for the roses, I whispered.

I remember my mother once wore a black hat, her round face rosy and dimpled under it. "You're beautiful," I told her seriously. She frowned as though I were bothering her. "Oh, you're always telling me I'm pretty!" I remember how white her teeth were when she smiled. Playing it back in my memory, I see she was pleased.

The small child who lives within me has packed my memory bag with haphazard snips of beauty. She has created my past for me from single, random glimpses she has fancied. And if that is so:

Thirty years from now my husband, much older of course, along with my children and grandchildren and *their* babies, are sitting together in my bedroom. My clothes and jewelry are scattered on the bed, tables and floor and they're trying to figure out what to do with them. Jewelry isn't so bad, but when their owners die, dresses are inconsolable.

Perhaps my granddaughter Eliza will say, "I remember grandma when she wore this dress. Even though I was just a little girl, I remember that I loved the little pink buttons down the back."

"Isn't that funny, I remember her in that dress too," my daughter Laurie will say. "We must have been visiting at the time. It was in the spring, I think, and I remember her laughing."

"It was when she went to the Bentons' wedding, wasn't it, Dad?" That's Trisha, who always remembers functions. "She looked so pretty that night."

Eliza's first-born is toddling around the room just learning to walk, and Trisha will bring her grandson over and hold his hand on the dress and say "Great Grandma. Great Grand-ma," the way you do when you talk to babies. And the baby will touch the silk with his little fat hand and he'll lisp, "Want Great-Grandma," and look around the circle for me. And everybody will start crying.

I think that's pretty good value for a dress even if I only wear it once. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY FLASH ROSENBERG

Elaine Winer is an award-winning writer whose work has appeared in numerous journals. She is now completing a masters in creative writing at Florida International University.